THE HUMAN HARVEST

Changing Farm Stress to Family Success

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PREFACE

The Human Harvest: Changing Farm Stress to Family Success was prepared to accompany the Manitoba Educational Television production "The Farm Stress Test." Viewers of the television show were introduced to some of the stressors experienced by Canadian farm families, and were able to conduct a preliminary self-test of their own farm stress. The program also explored how a typical farm family copes with the stressors of farming. Both the television show and this manual were based on Canadian research findings and the experiences and observations of Canadian farm men and women.

The Human Harvest begins by examining the nature of farm stress and the aspects of farming which are most stressful. Readers will have the opportunity of assessing their own farm stress and comparing it with norms from Canadian farm men and women. Besides allowing readers to evaluate personal levels of stress and understand how stress is affecting their lives, the manual provides the "F A R M" model of stress management for farm families. Specially designed for farmers, F A R M provides the framework for turning farm stress from a negative to a positive influence. Throughout the manual, reader participation is encouraged by Activities which allow increased understanding of personal levels of stress and stress symptoms and which stimulate exploration of personal and family strategies which can "Change Farm Stress to Family Success."

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1.
The Positives and Negatives of Farming

"I love the work and the life."

"Living on a farm gives a lot of fun and enjoyment. I think the stress you have in farming is outweighed by the opportunity to be really close with your family."

"Stress takes the fun out of farming."

These comments from prairie farm men and women reflect some of the positives and negatives of modern farm life. None of you would be involved in farming if you didn't value and cherish the many positive features of the farming lifestyle. The farm environment is a wholesome place to raise your family and teach them values of independence, productivity, love of nature, and morality. Farming allows you to experience the satisfaction of nourishing growth. The farm lifestyle lets you work with your family in a setting which can create a powerful sense of love and cohesion. Agriculture provides the exciting challenge of mastering numerous skills and applying this knowledge in your own business.

Yet, as a farmer, you also know that farming isn't quite the idyllic and peaceful pastoral scene that many city people still imagine. Farming is a tough, demanding business, and fluctuations in the world commodity market make it harder than ever to turn a profit. As the operator of a family farm, you are aware of the economic pressures, you have first-hand experience with the dozens of demands in running a modern Canadian farming operation, and like some other farm men and women, you may sometimes feel that the stress of modern farming is robbing you and your family of the joy and satisfaction of life. There may be days when you are feeling tired and discouraged. At times it may seem like there is just too much work to be done in too little time. You may find yourself becoming more irritable. Maybe you're having headaches or trouble sleeping. These are just a few of the warning signs of too much stress.

If you've ever wondered if you were the only one having difficulty coping with the complex demands of modern farming, you can relax. You've got lots of company. In 1977, farming was ranked as the tenth most stressful occupation among 136 different careers (Smith, Culligan, & Nurell, 1977). It is likely that if this comparison was repeated today, farming would be even higher on the list of stressful occupations. Because farm families find themselves in such a potentially stressful situation, it is especially important that they recognize how stress may be affecting their lives and take steps to cope and thrive with the challenge of farm stress.

Lately, we seem to be hearing much about the hardships of farming and little about its positives. One farm woman put it this way: "I think a lot of our stress is caused by always hearing from the news media how bad a situation the farmer is in — we never hear any news on the bright side."

The good news is that, when faced with demands, farmers quietly go about the business of finding out what they need to know to cope more successfully and then they simply do it! Your reading of this workbook is an example of this tendency. Even though farming may be a very stressful occupation, farmers have always coped and they are increasingly taking the time to learn to enrich their lives by managing farm stress more effectively.

Although most of the effects of chronic stress are far from pleasant, we will try to focus on the positive throughout this workbook. Stress is an inescapable part of life. Most of us could cope with stress better than we do. Improving personal stress management skills is a constructive and positive aspect of personal growth and it is this aspect of stress management which we hope to emphasize.

What is Stress?

Let's start by making a very important distinction between "stress" and "stressors." "Stress" is how we react to the demands that are placed upon us. "Stressors" refer to the demands encountered. An example may be useful in understanding the important distinction between stress and stressors.

Suppose that your tractor breaks down during a busy time. The breakdown is an event which creates a demand on your resources. It is a stressor. You may or may not react to this stressor with stress. Stress is your own reaction to the demand (stressor). If you reacted to the stressor with increased blood pressure, a feeling of frustration over the setback, and by being a bit snappy with the hired man, you experienced stress. If you took the breakdown in stride, and viewed it as unfortunate but not catastrophic, you may not have experienced any stress. Identical stressors may create incredibly high

levels of stress in some people and little or no stress in others. Likewise, at some times you may react to the same stressor with little stress while at other times you may experience considerable stress.

Why bother with making a distinction between "stress" and "stressors?" The difference between these two concepts is important to really understanding what stress management is all about. It is impossible to escape the demands of life. We are continually subjected to various stressors. Unfortunately, some of these stressors may represent negative or unpleasant events which are impossible to control, avoid, or change. In farming, the weather is a good example. You can't control or avoid bad weather. It represents a stressor which farmers have had to accept as an occupational hazard. This doesn't mean that bad weather has to create unpleasant levels of personal stress. How you react to the stressor is up to you.

Successful stress management suggests that there are numerous things you can do to anticipate and help minimize the negative impact of weather as a stressor. Crop insurance is one of the first things which come to mind. Keeping informed of upcoming weather conditions and planning your farming activities accordingly is another. To a certain degree, these activities can actually protect you from some of the negative effects of the stressor.

Suppose that the stressor of bad weather occurs and you suffer substantial crop loss. Won't you naturally suffer a great deal of stress? Not necessarily. Remember, how you react (with little or much stress) is up to you. We're certainly not suggesting that you will ever welcome a weather-related crop loss or not have regrets about the bad luck, but you can minimize the amount of stress you experience.

We're reminded of the farm family in southwestern Manitoba who were hailed out. Unfortunately, they had no insurance. In 32 years of farming they had never had a major crop loss from hail and decided to risk going without insurance. Naturally, they were not pleased, but they chose not to dwell on the loss. By maintaining a sense of optimism about the future and by placing the loss in perspective, they were able to minimize the amount of stress associated with a major stressor.

As you work through the rest of this workbook and begin to develop your own personal strategies for managing stress, keep the distinction between "stress" and "stressors" in mind. Some of the stressors of farming and farm life are avoidable, others are not. On the other hand, all of us can learn to manage our stress more effectively.

Why be So Concerned About Stress?

It's hard to open a magazine or newspaper without seeing at least some mention of stress. Why the sudden interest?

The increased concern about stress has paralleled discoveries in psychology and medicine which have shown that stress has an intimate relationship to many illnesses. Prolonged stress, by lowering the efficiency of your immune system, can make you more susceptible to a wide range of illnesses. In some cases such as gastric ulcers and cardiovascular illness, the biological responses involved in chronic stress can cause serious illness and even death. Stress can also cause illness indirectly by altering a person's behavior patterns. Consider, for example, the case where a person tries to deal with stress by increasing their alcohol consumption or smoking. Both of these stress-caused behaviors can ultimately produce illness.

Besides producing physical illness, stress can also produce a variety of other serious consequences. Prolonged stress can lead to feelings of tenseness, depression, fatigue, sleep disturbances, distractibility, jumpiness, and problems in getting along with others. It's little wonder that we've become increasingly concerned about stress! The list of medical conditions and psychological symptoms associated with stress reads like a medical textbook of "Things to Avoid."

How Stress Shows Itself

Stress usually shows itself in four general types of responses:

1. Physiological
2. Emotional
3. Cognitive
4. Behavioral

When we experience stress our body produces a complex set of hormonal and physiological changes designed to create biological arousal. Blood pressure goes up, heart rate increases, respiration and blood sugar increase, the circulation of blood to the skin is reduced, and blood circulation to the muscles is increased. This concert of physiological responses is nature's way of mobilizing our emergency resources to respond quickly to a threat.

In addition to these physical stress responses, stress can also show itself in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. Cognitive responses may include such involuntary stress reactions as mental distractability, inability to concentrate and disruptions on tasks which require thinking. In some cases cognitive responses may also include intrusive, morbid, or repetitive thoughts. Some of the potential emotional reactions in stress include fear, anxiety, excitement, anger, depression, embarrassment, or even denial. The potential behavioral responses in stress are virtually limitless, depending on the nature of the stressor and the person. Two general categories of behavioral response include taking confrontative action against the stressor or withdrawing from the threatening event.

Is Stress Always Bad?

Stress is not always bad. Like it or not, stress is an inescapable part of life. Dr. Hans Selye, one of the founders of modern stress research, was fond of saying that the only time we completely escape stress is when we are dead. Obviously, most of us wish to avoid this stress-free state for as long as possible!

The time-tested wisdom of the old adage "Moderation in All Things" seems to apply to the question of an ideal level of stress. Too little stress is less than ideal and too much stress can be dangerous. There seems to be a medium level of stress which produces an optimal level of physical and psychological functioning. If you have too little stress, your level of motivation may be so low that you can't get up the energy to complete the simplest task.

With too little stress, you may find yourself procrastinating and not dealing with small problems until they become big problems. Some psychologists interpret apathy and boredom as symptoms which indicate the presence of too little stress.

The problem of too much stress is perhaps more commonly observed. Such a state of excess stress is also seriously disruptive. We've already seen how such chronic stress can damage health and impair your optimal level of functioning. Most of us can readily recall what has happened to our thinking processes during a time of intense stress. Have you ever reacted to a stressful event with anger, for example? Most of us have, and the intense emotional reaction usually impairs our ability to think rationally, to solve problems, and make good decisions. Under high levels of stress, our performance is impaired.

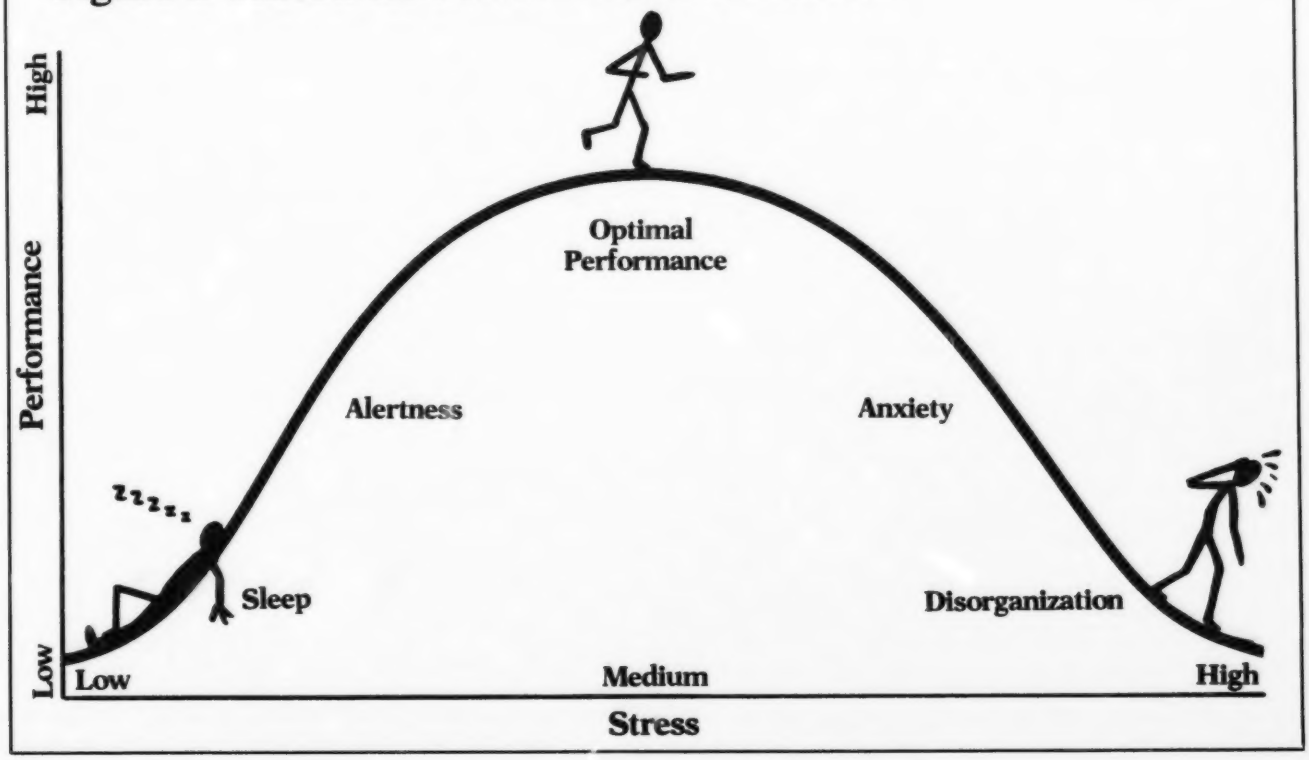
Under moderate levels of stress our bodies and minds are fine-tuned for their optimal performance. We are alert and responsive, but not so overly aroused that mental or physical performance deteriorates. The relationship between stress and optimal level of performance is illustrated in Figure 1.

Part of successfully managing stress involves assessing and understanding your own optimal level of stress functioning. Do you have too much or too little stress? There is not one ideal level of stress for everyone. Selye liked to compare people to "Turtles" and "Race Horses." Turtles are obviously better suited for a slower pace than Race Horses. Neither style is better — they're just different. Although the Turtle-Race Horse dichotomy is a bit of an overgeneralization, the point remains that each of us has an ideal level of stress. Personal stress-management should begin with the process of getting to know our own personal stress-comfort zone, and finding ways to maintain our stress in this optimal range.

Summary

1. Most farmers, if given the choice, would be reluctant to trade jobs with urban residents. The farm offers an ideal environment in which to raise children and make an essential contribution to society.
2. Although farming is a challenging and personally rewarding occupation, it is also one of the most stressful. The usual pressures associated with farming in addition to the current financial crunch, have helped create an awareness of farm stress and a desire among farm men and women to improve stress-management skills.
3. Stressors are the demands we experience. Some stressors can be eliminated or avoided, others may be uncontrollable.
4. Stress is how we react to these demands. While some stressors may be unavoidable, we can learn to control stress. Stressors are outside us. Stress is inside.
5. Stress can damage health, cause illness, and create other disruptive symptoms. If stress is too high or too low, our efficiency is impaired.
6. Stress can show itself in bodily changes and emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions.
7. Stress is not always bad. For each of us, there is an ideal level of stress. To find out where you are on the stress-curve, ask yourself this question: Will taking on a new responsibility increase my efficiency or decrease it?

Figure 1: The Stress-Performance Connection



Activity: An Initial Look At Stress and Stressors

To start the process of improving your personal stress-management skills, spend a few minutes answering the following questions. They will help you think about some of your reactions to farming and will help to increase your awareness of how stress may be affecting you and your family.

1. List some of the things you like best about farming and the farm lifestyle:

2. List some of the things that you like least about farming and the farm lifestyle:

3. Identify some of your most important personal stressors:

4. How much stress would you say you have been experiencing lately?

_____ Very little _____ Some Stress _____

_____ Moderate Stress _____Very Much

5. How much stress do you usually experience?

_____ Very little _____ Some Stress _____

_____ Moderate Stress _____Very Much

6. List any ways you think stress may be affecting you.

7. Think about your own optimal level of stress. How does your usual stress level compare with what seems best for you?

_____ I could use more stress

_____ Stress level is about right for me

_____ Stress level is probably too high

This and the other activities in the workbook may be completed by each family member. You may wish to share answers with your family in a collective effort to develop a family-oriented plan of stress management.

Chapter 1 activities will provide a useful reference point to compare your initial perceptions about stress with your insights later in the course.

2.
Recognizing Farm Stressors

"The financial squeeze is very stressful."

"My father is very unreceptive to change — to me this causes stress."

"Besides working on the farm, I am working 30 hours a week in town and I'm stressed trying to get everything done."

The first step in taking an active part in learning to manage your stress more effectively is to take stock of your stressors. By identifying the events, pressures, and responsibilities in your life which are causing stress, you can begin to discover how to manage both stressors and stress more beneficially and positively. In fact, once you have isolated your major stressors, you may find that more of them than you imagined are things you can learn to control, avoid, or lessen. Let's begin the process by considering some of the things about farming and farm life which can be stressful.

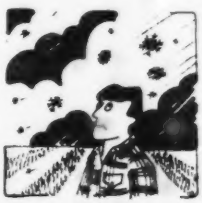
Farm Stressors

The Manitoba Educational Television show, "The Farm Stress Test", introduced you to some of the events and pressures which can be sources of stress to farmers. Recent research with close to 1200 prairie farm men and women has identified various events and situations associated with farming which can act as serious stressors (Walker and Walker, 1986). Some of these events are pressures which can be experienced by anyone independent of farm life. Others are stressors which are either unique to farming or more commonly experienced by farm families.

"Yesterday . . . all my credit payments seemed so far away . . . now it looks as though they're here to stay . . ."

Financial Stressors. The current farm financial crunch is providing a serious source of stress to farm families. Most farmers are caught in the price-cost squeeze and the financial viability of the family farm is under constant threat.

Financial stressors frequently cited by farmers include: Low commodity prices, rising expenses, high debt loads, lack of a regular cash flow, and not enough money for necessities and vacations. One farmer put it this way: "It can be very depressing to see markets drop and input costs rise. These forces are beyond our control and create a lot of stress."



Weather Stressors. Farmers have always had to contend with the unpredictability of the weather. Perhaps one of the reasons why farming is such a stressful occupation is the number of things which have to come together to succeed in farming. Favourable weather is certainly such an element. To produce that bountiful harvest for which Canadian farmers are so well known, the weather must cooperate in producing a narrow and optimal range of temperatures, sunshine, and moisture. If one element of the weather equation is out of whack, yields can suffer or even be wiped out. It is little wonder that when farmers are asked to identify some of the major stressors of farming they include events such as: delays in planting or harvesting due to weather; too much or too little rain, hail, early frost, and the very unpredictability of the weather itself as a source of worry and stress.

Work Overload Stressors. Farm men and women are expected to master a dozen trades. Successful farming requires the skills of businessperson, manager, agronomist, meteorologist, mechanic, laborer, and veterinarian. Add to these the demands of being a husband or wife and a father or mother, and you get some idea of the complexity of the demands placed on modern farm men and women. One prairie farmer aptly summarized it this way: "If you're looking for an easy job, farming isn't the answer."

Examples of some of the work overload stressors identified by many farmers include: Heavy workload at peak times, pressures in having too much to do in too little time, difficulties finding time to balance work and family responsibilities, having to wear too many hats and be too many things, and being expected to work on the farm as well as manage the house and family.

Other People as Stressors. None of us exist in a social vacuum. Our daily lives involve contact with friends, family and others. While interactions with others can provide enrichment and fulfillment, other people can sometimes be significant sources of stress. Many of the prairie farm men and women recently surveyed in the farm stress research identified problems interacting with other people as significant sources of stress. Some of the stressors falling in this category include: problems in a farm operating agreement with relatives; not seeing enough people; conflicts with spouse; decisions being made without your personal knowledge; not spending enough time with your spouse and family; and not being considered as an important part of the farm business by others.

One farm woman put it this way: "My husband hasn't been off the farm overnight in the past 10 years. In spite of this closeness, we find it very hard to maintain a strong family unit as the farm takes so much of our daily lives." Another farmer revealed his worries about treating his two sons fairly. One farm couple expressed concern about growing distant from each other and not being able to share their hopes, fears and worries with each other as they used to do. All of these situations provide examples of stressors which are social in origin.

Farming Hassles. These stressors are the dozens of little demands and pressures which are part and parcel of farming and rural life. An equipment breakdown at a peak time, having to travel long distances for goods and services, problems with weeds or insects, sickness in livestock, pressures in keeping up with new technology and products, loss of farm help when most needed, having

to use hazardous chemicals, need to learn and adjust to new policies and regulations — the list could be longer, but you get the idea. Each day on the farm is complete with a new list of challenges, demands, or problems. Some stress researchers have suggested that these little hassles may ultimately prove to be more stressful than some of life's more major events. It's a little like the old notion of "the straw that broke the camel's back." If you're already loaded down with a host of demands and pressures, even one additional small stressor could be more than you can handle.

Farm Worries. Farmers certainly don't have an exclusive monopoly on worry, but they seem to do their fair share of it. Perhaps this is understandable when you consider the complexity of running a modern farm and the many things that could go wrong. In any case, worry is among the least productive human emotions. It's been said that worry changes only one thing — the worrier. For many of us, worry is a major internal stressor. By worrying and fretting over what may never happen, we manage to create even more stress for ourselves.

Many of the stressors identified in earlier categories create stress for farmers in two ways: the actual events occur and create stress, or the apprehension and worry about the events may continue to stress us long after the event itself is passed or in anticipation of an event which may never occur.

Some of the more frequently reported worries among farm men and women include: worries about the continued financial viability of the farm; worries about the weather; worries about owing money or having to take out additional loans, worries about market conditions, and worries about keeping the farm in the family.

How Farmers Rank Farm Stressors

The farm men and women who participated in the recent farm stress research in the prairie provinces each completed "The Farming Stress Inventory." This farm stress scale contianed 60 potential stressors in farming previously identified in interviews with farm men and women. Participants rankedeach of these farm stressors in terms of how frequently they were experienced and how much personal stress they generated (Walker and Walker, 1987). The top 15 stressors identified by farm women and men are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Top 15 Stressors as Ranked by Farm Men and Women.

Men	Women
1. Rising Expenses	1. Rising Expenses
2. Low commodity prices	2. Low commodity prices
3. Concerns about farm finances	3. Heavy work load at peak times
4. Government regulations	5. Time pressures
5. Time pressures	5. Long work hours
6. Heavy work load at peak times	6. Worries about farm viability
7. Cheap food policies	7. Prolonged bad weather
8. Machinery breakdown	8. Machinery breakdown
9. Prolonged bad weather	9. Weather related crop loss
10. Weather related crop loss	10. Delay in planting/harvesting
11. Metric conversion	11. Worries about owing money
12. Worries about market conditions	12. Government regulations
13. Long work hours	13. Unplanned interruptions
14. Delay in planting/harvesting	14. Worries about weather
15. Distortions of the farm situation	15. Few vacations

What Makes Events Stressors?

No event, by itself is stressful. Whether an event will be stressful or not depends on how it is perceived by the individual. What are some of the characteristics of events that make them more likely to create stress?

Negative events are most likely to produce stress. Both positive and negative events have the potential to produce stress when they present extra demands or problems which exceed our coping resources. Getting married, having a baby, or getting ready for Christmas are all positive events that can drain substantial energy and time. Nevertheless, research on stressors has indicated that negative and undesirable events are more likely to be perceived as stressful. Negative events are also more strongly related to both physical and psychological symptoms of stress (Taylor, 1986).

These results were substantiated again in the recent farm stress research project. All of the top farm stressors identified in Table 1 represent negative events. In fact, during the course of the project, the only positive event which was mentioned by farmers as a stressor was the extra hassles involved in planning a vacation for farmers with livestock.

Uncontrollable or unpredictable events are more stressful. Stress research has consistently demonstrated that uncontrollable or unpredictable events are more stressful than events people feel they can predict, control, or terminate. Lack of control over stressors was a consistent theme mentioned by farmers in the farm stress project. The top farm stressors are not only negative events which threaten the viability of the family farm, but they are events such as the weather, prices, government policies, and operating costs over which the farmer perceives little control.

Ambiguous events are perceived as more stressful. When a potential stressor is ambiguous in the sense that it isn't immediately clear how to cope with the demand, it produces more stress because you must devote time and energy in trying to understand the stressor and figure out how to cope with it. Many major farm stressors have this type of ambiguity — what, for example, can the individual farmer do about falling commodity prices?

Long lasting stressors are more dangerous than short-term events. One of Dr. Hans Selye's major contributions to our understanding of stress was the discovery of how the body responds to chronic stressors. Initially, the body responds to stressors with an Alarm Reaction in which all of the body's responses to stress appear. If the stress continues, the body becomes used to it and enters the Resistance Stage. There is a limit, however, to how long the body can adapt and the person may enter the Exhaustion Stage. It is during this Exhaustion Stage, caused by high levels of chronic stress, that the individual starts showing physical and psychological symptoms of stress.

One farmer expressed his personal experience with the effects of chronic stress in this way: "I feel that stress accumulates over the years. In my own case, my body's ability to cope seems to have decreased. In the past ten years, I've had about eight separate very stressful events and each one seems worse than the one before." This reaction is common in response to long-lasting stress and provides a clear signal that acquiring extra stress-management skills and resources is critically important.

Differences in Stress Among Farmers

In our stress-management workshops with farm families and also in the farm stress research, it has become apparent that there are wide differences among farmers in the amount of stress they are experiencing. For some, stress is low even though they are experiencing the same economic hardships as the rest of the farming community. Other farmers are experiencing many negative stressors but are showing only moderate levels of stress because they have developed many personally effective coping mechanisms. Among some farm men and women, however, the pressures have exceeded their coping resources and they are showing some of the danger signs of chronic stress. How does the stress level differ among various groups of farmers? As you read about some of the differences, you might want to speculate on possible reasons for them.

Younger farmers are reporting more stress. In our farm stress research, younger farmers clearly showed higher stress levels than older, more established farmers. The breaking point in age-related stress differences appeared to be around 50 years of age. Farmers younger than 50 had higher overall stress levels than those over 50.

Type of farm operation is related to stress. Comparisons between different types of farms showed that farmers in dairy or mixed (grain and livestock) operations showed higher stress levels than farmers in straight grain operations.

Extra off-farm work creates more stress. The necessity of holding an off-farm job, in addition to the regular demands of running the farm, seems to be an increasingly frequent occurrence among Canadian farm families. In our study, 33% of the farm men reported holding an off-farm job, while 41% of the women held an off-farm job. These statistics closely approximate the national figures for off-farm employment. Stress levels were found to be significantly higher among those farmers holding off-farm employment. If you're among the increasing numbers of Canadian farmers who find it necessary to get an off-farm job, it may be particularly important for you to develop your resources for coping with the extra stress of holding two jobs.

Differences in stress between farm men and women. Women often experience higher levels of stress than men — a finding which was also found in the farm stress study. Our traditional views often place many extra demands on women. Besides working as a full partner in the farm business, many farm women are traditionally expected to have full responsibility for home and family matters. Add to this the extra demands of an off-farm job, and you end up with a farm women who is juggling a multitude of different roles and trying to cope with a wide variety of different stressors. In fact, our research showed that it was just this type of role-overload situation which provided a strong prediction of the total amount of stress a farm woman was likely to experience. To make the situation even more complex, women are typically cast in the role of providing the major source of strength, support and nurturance to the rest of the family. Where does the family's chief provider of psychological support turn when she herself is feeling the effects of farm stress? What follows in this workbook will provide some suggestions to help answer this question.

The Peaks and Valleys of Farm Stress

The workload on most farms shows clear seasonal variations. Spring and Fall are particularly busy with planting and harvesting. The calfing season can be equally hectic, and winter can bring its own unique set of problems. When farmers were asked to identify their most stressful season in the farm stress study, fall and spring were in close contention for the most stressful season. One farm wife shared an interesting anecdote about her own recognition of the seasonal nature of farm stress — she advised her children: "Don't bug your father during harvest." (Presumably, it was okay to bug their father at other times.)

An important aspect of stress management for farm families lies in the recognition of the seasonal nature of farm stress. Because of the predictable cyclic nature of these seasonal patterns of stress, planning and anticipation can play an important role in building your resources to deal and cope with the seasonal peaks of farm stress.

Activity: The Farming Stress Inventory

Take a few minutes and complete The Farming Stress Inventory. This is the same farm stress inventory used in the farm stress study discussed throughout this chapter. Completing the inventory will help you identify some of your major stressors and will allow you to compare your stress with that of other farmers.

Instructions: Each of the events and situations listed in the inventory represent potential sources of farm-related stress. For each item, indicate the frequency of occurrence of the event from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). Also indicate the degree of personal stress the event had on your life from 1 (no stress) to 5 (very much stress). (If you have never experienced the event, leave both scales blank for that item.) For every item that you have experienced, circle both its frequency of occurrence and its degree of stress.

		Frequency of Occurrence					Degree of Stress				
		1 almost never	2	3	4	5 almost always	1 no stress	2	3	4	5 very much stress
1.	Sudden and significant increase in debt load.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Significant production loss due to disease or pests.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Insufficient regular cash flow to meet financial obligations or for daily necessities.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Delay in planting or harvesting due to weather.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Media distortions of the farm situation.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Low commodity prices.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Significant change in type or size of farming operation.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Meeting with a loan officer for an additional loan.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Purchase of major machinery, facility, land or livestock.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Not being considered as part of the farm business by others.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Taking an off-the-farm job to meet expenses.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Prolonged bad weather.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Problems with weeds/insects.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Machinery breakdown at a critical time.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
15.	Not enough time to spend with spouse.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Crop loss due to weather, hail, not enough rain, excessive rain, frost, etc.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
17.	Personal illness during planting or harvesting.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
18.	Deciding when to sell.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Rising expenses	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Government policies and regulations.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
21.	Concerns about the continued financial viability of the farm	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
22.	Having a loan request turned down.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
23.	Farming-related accident	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
24.	Government "free trade" proposals.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
25.	Government "cheap food" policies.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
26.	Metric conversion.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
27.	Breeding or reproductive difficulties with livestock.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
28.	No farm help or loss of help when needed.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
29.	Need to learn and adjust to new government regulations/policies.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
30.	Spouse doesn't have enough time to help with child rearing.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
31.	Increased work load at peak times.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
32.	Unplanned interruptions.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
33.	Use of hazardous chemicals on the farm.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
34.	Dealing with salespeople.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
35.	Long work hours	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
36.	Few vacations away from the farm.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
37.	Concerns or worries about the unpredictability of the weather.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

38.	Feeling isolated on the farm.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
39.	Having to travel long distances for services, shopping and health care.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
40.	Pressures in having too much to do in too little time.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
41.	Keeping up with new technology and products.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
42.	Worrying about market conditions.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
43.	Having to make decisions without all the necessary information.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
44.	Being expected to work on the farm as well as manage the house and family.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
45.	Worrying about owing money.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
46.	Worrying about keeping the farm in the family.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
47.	Not seeing enough people.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
48.	Not having enough money or time for entertainment and recreation.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
49.	Death of a parent or member of immediate family.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
50.	Death of a friend.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
51.	Problems in balancing work and family responsibilities.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
52.	Problems in farm operating agreement with relatives.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
53.	Divorce or marital separation.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
54.	Problems with a partnership.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
55.	Daughter or son leaving home.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
56.	Trouble with parents or in-laws.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
57.	Conflict with spouse over spending priorities.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
58.	Major decisions being made without my knowledge or input.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
59.	Having to wear too many hats (e.g. farmer, spouse, father, mother, housekeeper, business person, etc.)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
60.	Surface-rights negotiations.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Other recent events which had an impact on your life. List and rate.			
_____		1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
_____		1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
_____		1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
_____		1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
_____		1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

Scoring: A calculator would be helpful in adding up your total score on The Farming Stress Inventory (It's not that we think your score will be astronomically high, but even an average stress score will be in the 400 range.)

Step 1: To the right of each item, multiply your ranking for the frequency of occurrence scale with your ranking for the degree of stress scale. (For example, if on item one you circled a frequency of occurrence of 2 and a degree of stress ranking of 4, then your stress score for that item would be 8 ($2 \times 4 = 8$).

Step 2: Record each of these item products to the right of the item. (If you left an item blank because it has never occurred, then that item will have a score of zero.)

Step 3: Add each of these item product scores together. This will give you your total score on The Farming Stress Inventory. (The possible range of scores on the inventory is from zero to 1800.)

Step 4: You might want to double check your scoring and addition. Now record your total score for the 60 items on the inventory here:

_____

Total Score on Farming Stress Inventory

Table 2. Percentile Norms for Total Farming Stress Inventory Scores for Prairie Farmers.

Women (Mean Score = 485)		Men (Mean Score = 420)	
Farming Stress Scores	Percentile Ranks	Farming Stress Scores	Percentile Ranks
Less than 237	0 - 10 %tile	Less than 210	0 - 10 %tile
238 - 309	11 - 19 %tile	211 - 262	11 - 19 %tile
310 - 375	20 - 29 %tile	263 - 315	20 - 29 %tile
376 - 424	30 - 39 %tile	316 - 364	30 - 39 %tile
425 - 471	40 - 49 %tile	365 - 404	40 - 49 %tile
472 - 538	50 - 59 %tile	405 - 446	50 - 59 %tile
539 - 596	60 - 69 %tile	447 - 492	60 - 69 %tile
597 - 653	70 - 79 %tile	493 - 554	70 - 79 %tile
654 - 706	80 - 89 %tile	555 - 647	80 - 89 %tile
More than 706	90 - 99 %tile	More than 647	90 - 99 %tile

Note: These Farming Stress Inventory Norms are based on a sample of 817 farm men and women from Canadian prairie provinces. The scores were collected in early 1986.

Interpretation of Your Score

1. Compare your Farming Stress Inventory score with the average (mean) score obtained by other farmers of your sex as presented in Table 2. Is your own score above or below the mean score of other farmers?
2. Also using Table 2, find the range of Farming Stress Scores into which your own score falls. This will give the percentile equivalent of your score. For example, if you are male and your score was 422, your score falls in the 50-59%tile range compared to other male farmers. Find the percentile equivalent range of your own score and record it here:_____ %tile
3. What do these percentile ranges mean? Basically, they show how your score compares with that of other farmers. For example, if your score falls in the 50 - 59%tile range, this means that 49% of the farmers in the normative group had scores lower than yours, 10% had scores in the same range as your score, and 40% had scores higher than yours. Finding the percentile equivalent of your score provides a way of comparing your score to the scores of other farmers. You can use your percentile range to help you judge if you are experiencing much more or much less farm stress than others.
4. Using the percentile range equivalent to your own score, record here the percentage of same-sex farmers having farm stress scores lower and higher than yours:

_____	_____
(Percentage with lower scores)	(Percentage with higher scores)

Putting Your Score in Perspective

You now know what your farm stress score is, if it is above or below the mean stress scores of other farmers, and what percentages of farmers score higher and lower in farm stress. This information can help you take stock of your farm stress level.

If your score is above the average, you are experiencing more stress than other farmers. It may be particularly important for your to take immediate steps to build your coping resources and manage your stress more effectively. Your percentile range can give a rough idea of the seriousness of your stress level. The higher this score, the more critically important it is that you devote immediate attention to stress management.

If your stress is close to the average level shown by other farmers, you are probably no more stressed than the average farmer. Keep in mind that the average farmer is experiencing more stress than observed in other occupations. Even an "average" level of farm stress may be too much!

If your score fell below the 30%tile, you are showing less stress than most farmers. Several possibilities may account for scores in the lower percentiles. Perhaps you are already coping better than most farmers with the stressors of farm life. Congratulations and keep up the good work! Alternatively, it is possible that the stress is there but you are not recognizing it. Stress has an insidious way of creeping up on us without our conscious awareness. We can become so tense and jumpy from chronic stress that we start thinking of it as "normal" and we forget what it really feels like to be relaxed. Sometimes, other people are better at recognizing our stress than we are. If you scored below average in farm stress, you might ask your spouse for his or her impression of your general stress level. Your low stress score may come as a surprise to someone who is in a position to be more objective.

Identifying Your Top Stressors

Now that you know how your stress compares with that of other farmers, you can begin to fine-tune your understanding of personal sources of stress. What are your major stressors? Go back to the product scores (the

product of your frequency of occurrence and degree of stress rankings) you calculated for each of the items on the Farming Stress Inventory.

Identify the items which produced the ten highest product scores. These are your top stressors. Once you have isolated your top ten stressors, rank order them here with the item receiving the highest product score being ranked as the top stressor, the second highest score ranked next, and so on until you rank all ten top stressors.

My Top Ten Stressors

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

The identification of your top stressors will provide a valuable focus to your stress management efforts. Later in this workbook, as you begin to design your own stress management program, you'll be coming back to this list and evaluating some of the possibilities for taking a bit more of the stress out of your top stressors.

Earlier in the chapter, we saw that farm stressors can fall into six different categories:

1. Financial
2. Weather
3. Work overload
4. Social
5. Hassles
6. Worry

Go back to your list of top stressors and place each stressor into one of these categories. With most of the stressors, you can fit the item into the appropriate category without many questions. If the item relates to money or farm financial matters, it fits in the Financial category. Similarly, weather items fit into that category. Items which reflect Work pressures fit into the work overload category (for example, "increased work load at peak times"). If the stressor is related to other people, identify it as a Social stressor (e.g. "problems in farm operating agreement with relatives," or "feeling isolated on the farm"). Any item referring to usual farm-related demands can fit into the Hassle category. Examples might include "machinery breakdown at a critical time", "use of hazardous chemicals on the farm", and "breeding or reproductive difficulties with livestock." Finally, if the item wording of any of your top stressors contains the words "concerns" or "worry", place that item in the Worry category.

Don't be overly concerned with making a precise categorization for each of your top stressors. Some of the items may overlap into more than one category. If it seems that this is the case, simply place the item into **both** categories. For example, the item "spouse doesn't have enough time to help with child rearing" might be a Work Overload stressor as well as a stressor with Social characteristics.

Once you have identified the major categories for your top stressors, record here the categories represented and how many top stressors fall in each category:

Category	Number of Stressors
Financial	_____
Weather	_____
Work Overload	_____
Social	_____
Hassles	_____
Worries	_____

Which categories of stressors are present among your top stressors? Which category seems to be most frequent (i.e, has the most stressor items in it)? Know this will be useful in organizing your new approaches to taking the stress out of our stressors.

Summary

1. Farm stressors often fall into financial, weather, workload, social, hassle, and worry categories. Many of these stressors are events which everyone can experience, other are stressors unique to farming and farm life.
2. Financial stressors currently rank high on the list of the most stressful things in farming. Other top farm stressors include work pressures, weather, and the daily pressures of farming.
3. Events which are uncontrollable, unpredictable, ambiguous, and long-lasting create the most stress.
4. Our studies of farm stress suggest that stress is higher in younger farmers, in farmers with mixed and dairy farms, in farmers holding an off-farm job, and in women.
5. The farm stressors which are most closely related to overall stress levels are not always financial stressors. Factors over which the individual farmer has a potentially significant amount of personal control were strongly related to total stress. Some of these stressors included social factors, time pressures, and work distribution.
6. Farm stress shows clear seasonal variations. Different types of stressors become active at different times of the year. The predictability of seasonal stressors can be used to help enhance the individual's stress management efforts.
7. Completing the activities associated with the Farming Stress Inventory will allow you to assess your own level of stress, to identify your top stressors, and to compare your stress to that of other farmers. This information will be invaluable in designing your stress management efforts.

3.
Signs and Symptoms of Stress

"...I always feel so tired without any reason."

"...I left the farm and filed for divorce."

"Everything I've worked for on the farm may be lost. Does this make me a failure as a person?"

Each of these comments from prairie farmers illustrates a different consequence of farm stress. Chronic fatigue, marriage problems, and damage to self-esteem are just a few examples from a long list of unpleasant and health threatening consequences which can be produced by high levels of chronic stress. In the last chapter, you examined your personal level of farm stress. Just how serious is a high stress level?

By itself, a high level of stress may not be overly harmful. The body does not appear to be damaged by short periods of stress. Stress prepares the body to deal with an immediate threat or emergency. Nature intended us to deal immediately with the source of the stress. If you are in the lucky position of being able to completely resolve the threat, your body will quickly return to its normal, non-stressed state. Unfortunately, most modern farm stressors are not amenable to such a "quick fix." When the individual's stress level is elevated over a period of days, months, or even years, the stage is set for stress to do its negative number.

Understanding how you experience stress has two components: It is important to be aware of the major sources of stress in your life and how much stress is present; it is also vital to be aware of the negative consequences that stress may be having on your health and happiness. The combination of stress along with the signs and symptoms of chronic stress is nature's way of telling you that you are in the "Exhaustion Stage" of the stress response. Not lowering your stress at this point could prove to be more than a simple failure to cope with some minor symptoms — it could be fatal.

"Your symptoms are insomnia, high blood pressure and mental depression — just how long have you been farming?"

Physical and Psychological Consequences of Chronic Stress

In Chapter 1, we briefly examined some of the physical responses which occur as part of the stress reaction. If prolonged, some of these biological responses can end up damaging our health and threatening life itself. Consider some of the hormonal changes in the stress response as an example. One naturally occuring response to a stressor involves the release of a hormone called cortisone from the adrenal glands. If cortisone levels are chronically elevated, there is evidence that it will destroy the body's resistance to infection, illness, and even cancer. The weakening of the immune system makes you more susceptible to even minor infections such as colds.

Another effect of chronic elevation of cortisone is to reduce the resistance of the stomach to its own acid. This may be the physical cause of the documented relationship between chronic stress and ulcers. Blood pressure may also be elevated in response to some of the hormonal changes in the stress response. The relationship between elevated blood pressure (hypertension) and premature death from heart disease is well known.

Other hormonal changes in the stress response can aggravate migraines, arthritis, and backaches. In fact, headaches and backaches are two of the most frequent physical symptoms of chronic stress. Millions of dollars are spend every year on over-the-counter pills to relieve these pains. Physical symptoms caused by stress are more common than most people realize. Stress is a major cause of a variety of physical complaints. Physicians estimate that at least 50 percent of all patient office visits are for problems caused by one type of stress or another.

Some of the hormonally induced changes caused by stress can make us tense and jumpy, aggravate insomnia, cause weight loss, and disrupt the digestive process. Stress related release of sugar into the blood can aggravate diabetes. Stress-induced release of cholesterol can cause a hardening of the arteries, or even a fatal heart attack. These are only some of the potentially dangerous physical effects of chronic stress. Please see Table 3 for a more comprehensive listing of the physical conditions which have been associated with chronic and high levels of stress.

By paying attention to the aches and pains of everyday life, we can begin to search out more effective ways to deal with farm stress. But if we ignore the various physical symptoms, or manage them exclusively with medications, the fire of stress will continue to burn.

Table 3 also lists some of the psychological conditions which can be caused by stress or aggravated by it. Chronically high levels of stress can lower your efficiency and adjustment, and prevent you from enjoying the many small daily pleasures which help make life worth living. The experience of a 36 year old farmer, we'll call him John, illustrates some ways in which stress can have adverse psychological effects.

In a group discussion at one of our stress management workshops for farm families, John readily acknowledged that he was highly stressed and that he was eager to learn new ways to manage his stress more effectively. He described some of the ways stress was affecting him this way: "I wake up every morning still feeling tired and almost dreading the day's work. It's funny, I used to enjoy farming, but not anymore. Maybe I need some more humor in my life. I find myself putting things off. The books are a mess and I've been dragging my feet in making some important decisions about next year. Little things seem to irritate me more than usual and I probably haven't been much fun to live with lately."

John recognized that all of these reactions were related to stress. This awareness generated an eagerness to do something about this stress and gain more control over his life. Your own awareness of how stress may be affecting your life can produce similar effects. As you read this chapter on the signs and symptoms of stress, keep an eye open for your own stress reactions. How is stress affecting you?

In our recent survey of stress symptoms in farmers, one of the most frequently reported psychological symptoms was frequent loss of temper. Over 78% of the farmers surveyed reported increased irritability! The famous psychiatrist, Dr. Walter Menninger, likened the highly stressed individual to a volcano on the verge of eruption. Stress can create a "short fuse" and the calm, easygoing person can find themself suddenly reacting with anger in situations that surprise you. The behavior of the Manitoba farmer who drove his car through the front door of the local credit union is probably an extreme case in point!

One of the most insidious things about many of the psychological symptoms of stress is that they can actually create more stress! Consider some of the ways people try to cope with stress as an example. Not all coping behaviors are beneficial. Drinking, smoking, use of drugs, and overeating can be symptoms of stress. They are also common maladaptive ways of coping with stress.

Alcohol is one of the most frequently used ways of coping with stress. Experience with occupational stress indicates that stress-related use of alcohol, and the tranquilizers Valium and Librium is alarmingly high (Fisher, 1978). A survey of thousands of readers of **Psychology Today** magazine found that drinking and overeating were among the most frequent methods of coping with stress. Use of alcohol, or overeating in response to stress are negative responses which can actually produce more stress. A vicious cycle is created wherein stress produces a symptom which acts to cause more stress.

Some of the psychological effects of stress are so subtle that they may escape your notice. We've seen how stress can create chronic fatigue. This state of exhaustion has an inevitable effect on our moods. When an individual is feeling tired and run down, the endless plain of exhaustion makes them feel listless, lose interest in their hobbies and friends, and experience much less joy and satisfaction out of life. You may find that your attention span is decreasing, nothing much is able to hold your interest for very long, and your desire to do things and explore new options reaches a low point. Whatever forms stress symptoms take, they should not be taken lightly. Symptoms signal that stress is doing damage.

We've seen that lowered efficiency and chronic fatigue are common consequences of stress. During prolonged bouts of stress, our senses become less efficient. They react to the overstimulation of stress by becoming less sensitive. The person becomes less observant of details, pays less attention to what is happening around him or her, and tunes out or ignores many sensations and experiences. Under such circumstances, we become more likely to make mistakes. This increased carelessness can lead to serious farm accidents. Indeed, it has been found that except for mining, farming has one of the highest rates of accidents of any occupation. Farmers become more accident-prone when they are under stress. The accident rates in high and low stress jobs is striking. It isn't even that some jobs are more dangerous — high stressed persons also have higher accident rates off-the-job (Lehmann, 1974).

We've already mentioned that farming is a highly stressful occupation. To what extent are farmers showing signs and symptoms of stress?

Stress Symptoms in Farmers

In our research with farm families, we have consistently observed strong correlations between stress level, as measured by The Farming Stress Inventory, and the presence of physical and psychological symptoms of stress. The data clearly show that those farm men and women who are experiencing the highest levels of farm stressors are also the individuals who are showing the highest incidence of stress symptoms. The percentages of farmers reporting stress symptoms is presented in Table 4.

Table 3. Conditions Caused or Aggravated by Stress.

Physical Conditions	
Lowered resistance to infection	Frequent colds & illnesses
Ulcers	Headaches
Backaches	Diabetes
Cancer	Chronic Fatigue
Hypertension	Heart Disease
Colitis	Sleep Disturbances
Sexual Problems	Nausea & Diarrhea
Obesity/Loss of Appetite	Hardening of Arteries
Strokes	Sweating
Shortness of Breath	Allergies
Skin Problems	Teeth Grinding
Muscle Aches	Pounding Heart
Psychological Conditions	
Proneness to Farm Accidents	Anxiety
Depression	Bad Temper
Irritability	Worrying
Easily Discouraged	Difficulty Making Decisions
Little joy in life	Loss of direction
Apathy	Cynicism
Loneliness	Intolerance
Fewer Contacts with Friends	Using People
Negative attitudes	Boredom
Negative self-talk	Forgetfulness
Poor Concentration	

Table 4. Percentages of Farmers Reporting Stress Symptoms

Symptom	Percentage Reporting
Increase in drinking	16%
Increase in smoking	17%
Weight gain/loss	44%
Change in health	43%
Trouble relaxing	71%
Nightmares	21%
Chronically tired	75%
Sleep disruptions	58%
Getting sick often	27%
Headaches	39%
Forgetfulness	73%
Trouble concentrating	68%
Frequent colds	35%
Increase in arguments	53%
Behavior problems in children	50%
Marriage problems	27%
Back pain	58%
Losing temper	78%
Avoiding decisions	59%

NOTE: Percentages are those farmers who gave a ranking of two or greater on the frequency of occurrence scale.

Activity: Assessing Your Stress Symptoms

Instructions: Each of the following items represents a potential consequence of stress. For each item, please indicate the frequency of occurrence of the event from 0 (never) to 5 (almost always).

	Frequency of Occurrence					
	0 never	1	2	3	4	5 almost always
1. Increase in drinking	0	1	2	3	4	5
2. Increase in smoking	0	1	2	3	4	5
3. Weight gain or loss.	0	1	2	3	4	5
4. Change in your health.	0	1	2	3	4	5
5. Trouble relaxing.	0	1	2	3	4	5
6. Nightmares.	0	1	2	3	4	5
7. Feeling tired most of the time.	0	1	2	3	4	5
8. Major change in sleeping habits (much more or much less sleep).	0	1	2	3	4	5
9. Getting sick often.	0	1	2	3	4	5
10. Frequent headaches.	0	1	2	3	4	5
11. Forgetting things.	0	1	2	3	4	5
12. Having trouble concentrating.	0	1	2	3	4	5

13. Frequent colds.	0	1	2	3	4	5
14. Increase in number of arguments with spouse or children.	0	1	2	3	4	5
15. Behavior problems in children.	0	1	2	3	4	5
16. Marriage problems.	0	1	2	3	4	5
17. Back pain.	0	1	2	3	4	5
18. Losing my temper.	0	1	2	3	4	5
19. Trying to avoid making decisions.	0	1	2	3	4	5

Scoring: To obtain your total score on the stress symptom scale, add each of your item rankings together. Record your total score here:

Total Score: _____

Interpretation of Your Score: Everyone may experience some of the stress symptoms in the scale at some time or another in their lives. If, however, you are experiencing a number of these symptoms on a fairly frequent basis, this is a strong indication that stress is already having some serious negative consequences on your life.

To see how your score compares with that of other farm men and women, use Table 5 to obtain the percentile equivalent for your score. Table 5 can be used in the same way that you used the percentile table for The Farming Stress Inventory in an earlier activity. Take your stress symptom score and using Table 5, find the percentile equivalent for your sex. This percentile score will tell you the percentages of other farmers who score higher or lower than you on the symptom scale. Using the table, record this information here:

My percentile score: _____

Percentage scoring lower: _____

Percentage scoring higher: _____

Now, identify those items on the scale which you experience most frequently. Going through your rankings, list here the items which received the highest frequency rankings:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

These are the ways in which you are most likely showing the effects of stress. Keep in mind that the list of 19 items in the stress scale you have just completed is not meant to represent a comprehensive measure of all of the possible effects of stress. There are many ways that stress might be affecting you which are not measured in this short scale. It would be worthwhile for you to spend a few moments at this point to consider any other signs or symptoms of stress which you may be experiencing. As a start to this reflection, you might want to refer again to the list of physical and psychological symptoms of stress presented in Table 3. Are you experiencing any of these symptoms on a regular basis? If so, list here the symptoms which you are experiencing:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Table 5. Percentile Norms for Total Stress Symptom Scores for Prairie Farmers.

Women (Mean Score = 39.03)		Men (Mean Score = 35.38)	
Symptom Scores	**Percentile Ranks**	**Symptom Scores**	**Percentile Ranks**
Less than 25	0 - 10 %tile	Less than 23	0 - 10 %tile
25 - 27	11 - 19 %tile	23 - 25	11 - 19 %tile
28 - 30	20 - 29 %tile	26 - 28	20 - 29 %tile
31 - 33	30 - 39 %tile	29 - 30	30 - 39 %tile
34 - 36	40 - 49 %tile	31 - 32	40 - 49 %tile
37 - 39	50 - 59 %tile	33 - 35	50 - 59 %tile
40 - 44	60 - 69 %tile	36 - 39	60 - 69 %tile
45 - 47	70 - 79 %tile	40 - 44	70 - 79 %tile
48 - 55	80 - 89 %tile	45 - 48	80 - 89 %tile
More than 55	90 - 99 %tile	More than 48	90 - 99 %tile

Note: These Stress Symptom Norms are based on a sample of 817 farm men and women from Canadian prairie provinces. The scores were collected in early 1986.

This personal checkup of your stress symptoms is not meant to provide a comprehensive diagnosis of possible stress symptoms. Rather, it can be a starting point for reflection. If you are high in symptom score compared to other farmers, or if you experience two or more of the symptoms on a very regular basis (a ranking of 4 or more on the frequency of occurrence scale), you may be a high risk candidate for the effects of excessive stress.

Summary

1. Prolonged exposure to excessive stress can produce life-threatening consequences.
2. The psychological consequences of excessive stress can lower your efficiency and productivity, prevent you from enjoying the pleasures and happiness of life, make you more prone to farm accidents, and threaten the health and happiness of your family.
3. The higher the level of farm stress, the greater the likelihood that the individual farmer will be showing some of the physical and psychological symptoms of stress.
4. The use of the stress symptom checks in the chapter activity can help you assess your own stress symptoms. If you experience more than a few of these symptoms on a regular basis, it is especially important that you develop more effective ways of reducing your stress.

4.
Coping with Farm Stress

"Having a husband who is a good friend and who shares with you both good and bad is what makes it bearable."

"We've farmed for 36 years...I live each day as it comes."

"My faith in God helps me cope with stress."

Modern farm life can be like living in a pressure-cooker and stress management skills can help keep the lid from blowing. To the farm men and women quoted above, the love and support of a spouse, refusing to worry, and faith in God provide protection from stress.

At our farm stress-management workshops, we often ask farmers to list the things they do to cope with stress. It's not unusual to end up with a list of over 100 different ideas. The farm men and women who cope most effectively are such accomplished coping experts that they could be writing this workbook. Many farmers, however, are like the rest of us — they could be coping more effectively.

Increasing personal stress coping skills will provide both immediate and long-term benefits. Besides increasing personal health and happiness, stress-management skills will improve the efficiency with which you operate your farm business. By learning to manage stress more effectively, personal productivity is increased, work pressures can be lessened, making good farm operating decisions is more likely, and you don't feel so wound-up with stress that you are unable to acquire and use new management and operating procedures which can improve the farm financial returns.

Coping and The Experience of Stress. The personal experience of stress is directly related to the individual's coping resources. You may recall the analogy of the stress-coping relationship presented in the Manitoba Educational Television show, "The Farm Stress Test" — the reading on your personal stress thermometer is directly related to your coping resources. When coping skills are low, you end up with elevated readings on your "stress thermometer." Increasing coping resources lowers your "stress temperature" to a more temperate and comfortable level.

This relationship between stress and coping was initially explored by the pioneering stress researchers Dr. Richard Lazarus and Dr. Susan Folkman (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

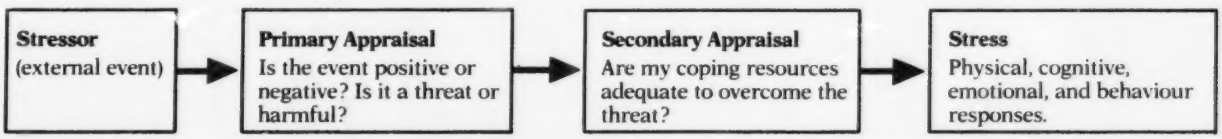
The Lazarus-Folkman Model of stress and coping is presented in Figure 2. Three events preceed the generation of personal stress — a potential stressor; primary appraisal; and secondary appraisal. The two appraisal components are both aspects of the individual's cognitive and coping reactions to the stressor.

Let's use an example to illustrate how the sequence actually works. Suppose that, like most farms, your operation is caught in the current farm financial squeeze. In terms of the stress-coping model, these financial threats represent the stressor.

The second part of the model, "Primary Appraisal", refers to your personal evaluation of the stressor. If you believe that the financial situation represents a major negative threat to the continued viability of your farm, your "primary appraisal" will label it as "highly stressful". So far, two elements are present which can potentially cause a great deal of stress — a stressor and your evaluation of it as negative and threatening.

One final step will ultimately be responsible for predicting how much stress is generated. The "Secondary Appraisal" component is the critical link. Depending on your secondary appraisal, the event may generate little stress or a great deal of stress. This Secondary Appraisal phase refers to your coping resources. Ideally, your

Figure 2. Factors Involved in the Experience of Stress.


Stressor
(external event)
Primary Appraisal
Is the event positive or negative? Is it a threat or harmful?
Secondary Appraisal
Are my coping resources adequate to overcome the threat?
Stress
Physical, cognitive, emotional, and behaviour responses.

coping skills will be sufficient to overcome the threat of the stressor and little stress will result. Less ideally, you may feel little control over the stressor, have no idea what else you can do to cope with it, and end up by experiencing high levels of stress.

In short, your Secondary Appraisal is the final link in determining how much stress you will experience. Going back to our example of the farm financial stressors, Figure 3 illustrates how the same financial stressor can generate either high or low levels of stress depending on both Primary and Secondary appraisal processes.

Stress management helps the individual reduce stress by building "secondary appraisal" or coping resources. Stress management can also help develop approaches to "primary appraisal" which are helpful in reducing stress.

Coping, Control, and Cognitions. Coping, control, and cognitions might be thought of as the "3-C's" of successful stress management. Cognitions are the way we think about our stressors, control refers to anything we do to directly influence our stressors or stress, and coping involves mobilizing our strength and resources for avoiding or reducing the threat from stressors. Each of the remaining chapters in this workbook will explore how you can use coping, control, and cognitions to protect yourself from dangerous levels of personal stress.

Of the 3-C's of stress management, control provides the touchstone for stress reduction. Through control we initiate coping, and by using control we can modify the cognitions which accentuate stress.

Control: The Key to Surviving Stress. A well known study in psychology illustrates the importance of feelings of control in the creation of stress. Two groups of individuals were working at tasks which required concentration. Both groups were subjected to loud distracting background noises. One of the groups had a button in front of them which would stop the background noises. The other group did not have access to the button.

As you would expect, the stress level was lower and productivity was higher in the group with the button. The real surprise in the experiment was the fact that no one actually pushed the button to stop the unpleasant noise! Just knowing that the button was there was enough to reduce stress and increase productivity!

The lesson in these results is that having "control buttons" for our stressors will allow us to live more successfully with them. Without actual control, or the feeling of control, our stressors will eventually get the best of us.

We're not suggesting that you can "think away" all of your problem stressors. Certainly, no amount of simple thinking will do much about the financial pressures of modern farming. You can, however, "think away" your stress.

Cognitions: The Power of Productive Thinking: Your cognitions play a major role in the production of stress. We've already seen how important primary and secondary appraisal are in the production of stress. Primary appraisal is almost completely cognitive — it relates to how we think about the stressor. Secondary appraisal also contains a cognitive element — how we "think" about our coping and control resources. Our cognitions can serve to produce stress, or to lessen it. The often heard comment "I can't do anything about it, so I'm not going to worry about it" is a good example of the use of a cognitive strategy to reduce stress. Learning to ignore what you can't control is a sound principle of effective stress management.

Another example of how cognitions can create stress lies in the types of words we use in our cognitive "self-talk." Some people fall into the "ain't it awful!" trap. They look for the negatives, see the awful and catastrophic possibilities in everything, and view life as if it were a raging river filled with hidden dangers. This type of thinking is guaranteed to increase your stress level. The

Figure 3. Identical Stressors Can Create Different Stress Levels.

	High Stress	Low Stress
1.	**Stressor** Financial Pressures	**Stressor** Financial Pressures
2.	**Primary Appraisal** "Can't keep farming if we don't make any money. It's certainly negative. A serious threat to the future of the farm."	**Primary Appraisal** "It's difficult and discouraging. Certainly negative, but I refuse to believe that there isn't a future in farming. I'll view it as a serious challenge rather than as an insurmountable problem."
3.	**Secondary Appraisal** "I'm tired of working so hard. What else can I try? It seems hopeless. How can I control world commodity prices?"	**Secondary Appraisal** "This winter I'm going to take a long, hard look at my operating statement and figure some ways to cut my expenses. How could I diversify into something that pays better? Maybe that agricultural seminar coming up will have some good ideas. I'll try and take better care of myself so I can cope with this thing."
4.	**Stress** Combination is right for creating a high level of stress. If prolonged, may cause major physical and psychological stress symptoms.	**Stress** Feeling that there are a number of things you can do to relieve the stressor creates a sense of personal control and optimism. Awareness of need to take care of yourself will improve strength necessary for coping. Less stress.

"Look on the bright side, dear. With no income, there's no income *tax*."

person who thinks of life as filled with challenges rather than problems will inevitably have less stress. Try it yourself! Rather than thinking of something as a problem, try labelling it instead as a "challenge." The word challenge suggests excitement and adventure. It evokes a generally positive emotional reaction. When we think of a "problem", our dominant emotional reaction is negative and we automatically cast the event into a threatening framework.

Recently, one of our honour students at Brandon University completed a research project on this very issue. She reasoned that the cognitions of people are related to the amount of stress they have. People who maintain an optimistic outlook on life should thus experience less stress than persons who are more pessimistic. The results of the study strongly confirmed the predicted relationship between otpimism/pessimism and stress. The lowest stress scores were consistently observed in those who were the highest in optimistic thinking. To use our "self-talk" idea again — the optimists are the ones who view life as filled with "challenges" rather than "problems."

Our research work with farm families has produced similar results. The farmer who has been able to maintain some sense of optimism and hope for the future has lower stress levels than farmers who are more pessimistic and discouraged about future prospects in farming.

Coping: The F A R M Model. With the 3-C's of stress management, you can use **cognitions** to reduce stress, to increase **control**, and to **cope** more effectively with stress. Coping with stress has many different facets. There are a multitude of different ways to cope and there are wide differences between people in how they cope with stress. To help organize some of the major coping strategies in a meaningful way and to make this information more relevant to farm families, we have developed the "F-A-R-M" model of coping. The model is based on our research findings with farm families and also on experience in stress-management workshops with hundreds of farmers. Farm families have painted a clear picture of the types of stressors experienced by farm men and women, which of these stressors are most importantly related to stress symptom danger signals, and the types of stress management resources which can be best used by farm families to improve the quality of farm life. We have tried to incorporate these observations into the F A R M Model of stress management.

To prevent undue suspense, we'll jump the gun and tell you how we've used the F A R M acronym. It stands for:

F — Fostering Family Strengths

A — Arming Yourself Against Stress

R — Relaxing

M — Managing Personal Resources

The remaining chapters will use the F A R M framework to explore stress management options for farm families.

Activity: Looking at Your 3-C's of Stress Management.

In prior activities, you have examined your farm stress level and identified some danger signals of stress which you may be experiencing. From these activities, you know how your own stress and symptom rates compare with those of other farmers. At this point, it will be useful to carry this self-reflection another step and consider how you are currently managing the stress in your life.

1. **Cognitions.** Are your cognitions serving as extra sources of stress? To help you assess the role your thinking may play in creating personal stress, be honest with yourself in answering these questions:

   A. How important is worry in generating some of your stress? Circle the number on the "worry scale" which best describes how much you worry:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Never worry		Occasional worry			Frequent worry			Very frequent worry	

   Sometimes, we're not aware of how much time each day we really do spend worrying. Because worry can be such a major source of extra stress, it may be useful for

you to keep a "worry log." For the next day or two, keep an eye open to the occurrence of any worrisome thoughts. Keep a simple tally of the number of times you find yourself worrying. The results may surprise you!

If your worry log or rating on the worry scale indicates that you spend more than a few minutes each day worrying and fretting over various things, it will be especially beneficial for your stress management efforts to acquire strategies to reduce the worry cognitions which are elevating your stress.

B. Cognitions also reflect your general outlook on life. We've seen in this chapter how attitudes of optimism/pessimism are related to stress. How would you assess yourself on the pessimism-optimism scale? Circle the scale number that best describes your own attitude and general outlook on life:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Always try to see the positive. Retain otpimism for the future.	Perceive an equal number of positive and negatives. Moderately optimistic for the future.	Find myself thinking of the negatives. Pessimistic for the future.

If you ranked 5 or greater on the scale, your cognitive outlook on life may be causing extra stress problems. As you succeed in managing stress more effectively, many of these negative cognitions will automatically improve.

2. **Control.** Feelings of lack of control can heighten your experience of stress. To examine the degree that this is happening in your own life, take a look at how much control you feel you have over your top stressors. Go back to the activity in Chapter 2 in which you identified your top stressors. List your top five stressors again here and rank each one on a scale from 1 to 10 in terms of how much control you feel you have over the stressor (let 1 on the control scale = no control and 10 = very much control):

Top Stressors	Amount of Perceived Control from 1 to 10
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____

You can take some of the stress out of these stressors by devising ways to increase your actual or perceived control over them To start the process, take your top stressor and think of some ways that you could increase your feelings of control over that stressor. These could include direct forms of action in dealing with the stressor, or ways to control your reactions to the stressor. List some of the ideas for improved control here:

_____

_____

*Ideas for increasing personal control over my top stressor:

(a) _____

(b) _____

(d) _____

(c) _____

3. **Coping.** It takes a strong person to admit, even to themselves, that they could be doing a better job coping with the daily pressures of life. Perhaps because of their proud tradition of independence and strength, the reluctance to admit personal deficiencies in coping is sometimes present in farmers. It may help you in being more open with yourself by knowing that most of today's farm men and women often feel that their personal coping resources are being tested to the limit. The pressures of farming are considerable, and there is a tremendous interest in the farming community in building personal resources to deal with farm stress.

You can begin your personal efforts by taking a critical look at your own coping strategies. How are you presently coping with stress? Think of the things that you do to cope. Some of our coping mechanisms are constructive, others may be less positive (e.g. drinking, smoking, overeating, etc.). List here some of the positive and negative things you use in your personal attempts to manage stress:

Positive Coping Practices

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Negative Coping Practices

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Each of the subsequent chapters on the F A R M model of stress management will share some ideas on how to add to your positive coping strategies and, hopefully, how to eliminate any current coping styles which have negative effects.

Summary

1. The reading on your personal stress thermometer is directly related to the adequacy of your coping resources. When coping resources are low, stress is high. If coping is adequate, the experience of stress is lessened.
2. The Lazarus-Folkman model of stress describes three factors which can cause stress: Stressors; Primary Appraisal; and Secondary Appraisal.
3. Stressors are external events which place a demand on us.
4. Primary Appraisal refers to how we interpret the stressor. If the stressor is perceived as negative and threatening, it may cause stress.
5. Secondary Appraisal refers to the perceived adequacy of our coping resources. If we have a plan of action to minimize the potentially negative impact of the stressor, our experience of stress will be reduced.
6. The "3-C's" of stress management are: Cognitions; Control; and Coping.
7. Our cognitions can actually help cause stress. Negative attitudes and "ain't it awful" thinking are frequent culprits.
8. Anything which increases our perceived or actual control over a stressor will help reduce stress.
9. Coping involves the use of our cognitions and actions to increase control.

5.
Fostering Family Strengths

The FARM Model of Stress Management

"I'm caught in the middle of a very tense relationship between my husband and son. I hope my son matures and his father begins to mellow."

"I had to leave farming because I couldn't get along with my father."

"I believe that family communication is a major problem of agricultural business. Most farmers just don't know how to communicate with other family members or hired workers."

Consider for a moment, the six major types of farm stress identified earlier — financial, weather, work overload, social, hassles, and worry. Which category of stressor would you guess to be most highly related to both overall stress and symptom rates?

Before analyzing the results of the farm stress research, we would have guessed that farm financial stress would be most predictive of both overall stress and symptom rates. The data proved us wrong. Social stressors were clearly the most closely predictive of stress and symptoms.

In our interactions with farm families we hear a similar theme. One of the most frequently requested topics for human development workshops from farm families is the issue of inter-generational conflict on the farm. Of all of the hundreds of comments and reflections which were added to the Farming Stress Inventories by the farm men and women who participated in the research, the theme of conflict between generations in the operation of the farm was among the most frequent.

These observations strongly suggest that there is a need in the farming community to foster family strengths as an important aspect of stress management. There is another important reason for emphasizing improvements in family functioning as a key aspect of personal stress management — a voluminous stress research literature clearly indicates that family support and love provides one of our strongest stress buffers. Resistance to stress is increased when we enjoy the love and support of a nurturing and caring family.

The relationship between stress and family factors can be a two-way street. Not only can a strong sense of family protect us from stress, but stress can also chip away and damage this very source of family support! A vicious cycle can be created in which stress may damage the family, with the weakening of the family serving to cause even more stress. In some cases, marital conflict is a good example of such a vicious cycle. Stress places extra demands on any marriage. In fact, the literature on marriage counselling is filled with examples of marriages that have failed during or after periods of extreme stress.

How should one interpret the apparent importance of social stressors among farmers? We believe that the identification of social factors as a top source of farm stress has a number of positive implications. Social stressors are very amenable to increased control. Almost always, the influence of social stressors can be lessened. This is particularly encouraging because it suggests that stress management doesn't have to start with big, impossibly difficult problems, but can begin right at home with efforts aimed at improving your relations with your family.

In our consideration of ideas to Foster Family Strength, we'll be suggesting ways to improve communication, positive approaches to conflict resolution, and how to improve the ways you show your love for your family.

Attacking Faulty Communication

Lack of accurate communication, or miscommunication, are the root causes of many problems with other people. "She/he just doesn't undertand" is one of the most frequently heard comments in the marriage counsellors office. In fact, a breakdown in communication is often one of the first signs that a marriage is in trouble. Lack of communication is also often behind inter-generational conflict. Either "my father doesn't understand" or "my son/daughter doesn't understand." What are some of the causes of faulty communication between family members and how might they be resolved?

We're reminded of the old story of the taciturn farm man who was offered a free ride in a barn-stormer's

biplane if he wouldn't say a thing during the entire ride. The pilot executed his entire bag of tricks, from flying upside down to doing vertical figure eights. Upon landing, the still silent farmer emerged from the plane a little shaky and a bit green. "Wasn't there a time when you wanted to say anything?", asked the pilot. "Only once," said the farmer, "back there when my wife fell out."

Thankfully, most of us are not quite that uncommunicative! It is surprising, however, how many couples don't take the time to spend quality time together simply talking and sharing. To a certain extent, talking about your feelings, problems, and tensions will in itself provide some feeling of relief.

Farm men in particular seem to have a reluctance to share problems and feelings. Some may believe that it's "unmanly" to admit problems or weaknesses. Others may simply be repeating how they saw their own father keep his feelings to himself. Whatever the reason, many farm marriages could be strengthened if farm husbands would learn to be more open, sharing, and communicative with their wives. (The same, of course, holds true for farm wives.)

The guidelines and suggestions for improved communication outlined here are applicable to your marriage relationship, to your relations with your children, and to your interactions with your parents and relatives. By improving communication, you can help minimize the stress coming from relationships, and also strengthen these relationships to increase their stress-buffer value.

Taking Time to Communicate. Some communication problems stem from simple lack of communication. When is the last time, for example, that you had a good honest and mutually sharing conversation with your spouse, with your children, or with your own parents?

We're reminded of our own attempts to maintain an open and sharing pattern of communication with our eleven year old son. A typical conversation might begin

Box 1. Initiating Communication

- Take time every day to talk with your spouse.
- At busy seasons on the farm, it seems like you have no time to talk. These are the high stress times when social support is most important. Make the time — even if it's only a few minutes.
- Try to direct communication away from only trivial things. Try and talk about feelings, goals, hopes, and fears.
- Be sensitive to times when your spouse or children offer openings to share their feelings. Don't let the opportunity pass without further encouraging them to share.
- Share your own feelings. When you share with others, it encourages them to do the same with you.
- If you usually are reluctant to share your feelings, you'll have to make an extra effort to learn this relationship-building skill. Give it an honest try. Be alert to your own feelings. The next time you are angry or down, resolve to talk it out with your spouse — you'll feel better for the effort, and if you keep at it, pretty soon it will start coming naturally.
- Consider being more selective in your television viewing. Some families find their conversations restricted to the 60 second commercial breaks! Try watching less tv and spending more time really talking and sharing with your family.
- Encourage your spouse and kids to come with you when you go to town. Time together in the car provides a good chance for quality conversation as well as providing a relaxing change of pace from work.
- Never retire for the day when you are feeling angry or upset with your spouse or kids. Talk it out and try to resolve the conflict before ending the day. Don't be afraid to apologize. (One mark of a strong person is being able to say, "I'm sorry, I was wrong.")
- Be sensitive to non-verbal cues from your family. If they look tired or down, comment on it. Initiate a conversation to give them a chance to share the feelings with you.
- Being sensitive and responsive to these non-verbal cues is a way of showing you care. Other people appreciate this concern. It shows they're important to you.
- Don't miss "golden opportunities" for sharing. Evening meals are an ideal time to share, vent feelings and process the day's events.
- Make a special effort during busy seasons to carve out some time for sharing with your spouse, even if it's only a few minutes at the kitchen table over a glass of milk before going to bed. (Besides providing the benefits of sharing, the milk will relax you and make you sleep better.)
- Consider starting a tradition with your spouse of spending at least 30 to 60 minutes each week talking "philosophy of life." Share goals, hopes, problems, feelings, disappointments, your children, etc. Establish this routine and soon it will happen naturally and you'll look forward to this relaxing time of mutual sharing and planning. Sunday is often a good day for this type of family tradition.
- Consider finding some time where this sharing and planning might also include your children.
- For several days, keep a record of the amount of time you spend in "significant" interactions with your spouse or family. The results may surprise you and help motivate you to change.
- If you're a father — it's particularly important that you spend quality time with your children. (Research shows that the average father spends only a few minutes each day with his children.)

Box 2. Steps to Becoming a More Effective Listener

- Maintain eye contact with the speaker. Looking at someone shows you are paying attention. Don't make it so intense that you appear to be staring, but break eye-contact only briefly when the other person is talking.
- Don't be afraid to ask for clarification of what is being said. If you don't understand — say so!
- Don't be so concerned about what you're going to say next that you don't hear what is being said.
- Focus on the intended general message, not on irrelevant details. Sometimes we pick up on one isolated word, perhaps not important, and turn the entire conversation in that direction. The intent of the communication is thus lost.
- Watch body language. Does the speaker look like they're carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders? Is the person frowning, blushing, or have their fists clenched? These signs can help us understand the speaker's frame of mind and add to the effectiveness of real listening.
- A good way to put yourself in the speaker's shoes is to verbally reflect the ideas and feelings of the other person. Comments like "It sounds like you..." can provide this type of verbal reflection.
- Be patient. Don't be too quick in jumping to conclusions. Let the other person finish their thought before you make any assumptions about the intended meaning. Use the extra interval between hearing and processing the words to continue focusing your attention on the intended message -- not on what you will say next, or on irrelevant thoughts.
- Refuse to be threatened by what the other person is saying. Everyone is entitled to their opinions. Even if you disagree, try and keep listening so you understand what is being said.
- Pay attention to what is being said. Besides helping you remember what was said, paying attention is rewarding to the other person.
- Don't interrupt needlessly. We sometimes become more interested in hearing ourselves talk than finding out what the other person has to say.
- Observe nonverbal as well as verbal cues. What is the tone of voice, for example? The person may say they're not upset, but their voice may be saying something very different.
- Put yourself in the other person's shoes. Try to understand what they are feeling. If you understand how they are feeling, you can better understand how they are seeing the situation.
- Don't be too much of an expert. We've all met people who know there is only one right way of doing things — their own! These individuals are usually extremely poor listeners. Why bother listening when you already have all the answers?
- Ask "opening up questions." This is an open-ended question that invites elaboration from the speaker. "Tell me more about it." is an example of an open-ended question.
- Use self-disclosure. Share your own feelings with the speaker. This encourages them to be less defensive.

with the opener from us, "How was school today?" If our son is feeling especially talkative, he might reply, "fine." Not giving up that easily, we often retort with "What did you do today in school?" When he replies, "nothing much", we know that initiating a "significant" interaction is going to be a bit more of a chore than we expected. More often than not, however, if we persist, our son will share with us some little event of the day that made him feel either good or bad. It is this type of "significant" communication which has such a tremendous value as a stress-buffer and reinforces the love you give and receive from your family. Consider some of the suggestions in Box 1 for ideas which you can use in initiating patterns of communication within your family.

The Difficult Art of Listening. Successful communication requires at least two people who are engaged in quite different roles — a speaker and a listener. If either is missing, there is a breakdown in communication. Of these two components, listening is probably the more difficult art. Few of us are really good listeners. Listening is more than just hearing. It involves paying attention, concentrating, tuning in to the total message (both verbal and non-verbal), and requires an openness or receptivity to what the speaker is trying to communicate.

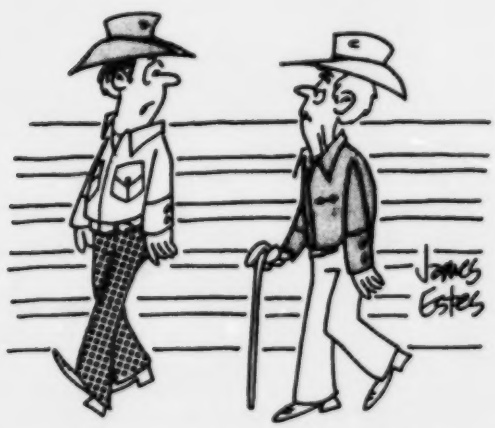
A number of factors conspire against good listening. Some of them include:

* Our minds process the words much faster than they are coming in. The average person speaks at a rate of 125 words/minute. We can understand at a rate of 400-600 words/min.
* The words are coming in at a snail's pace, and yet we are processing them like a K-Tel commercial. This leaves an interval which may distract our attention.
* During the time when the other person is talking we are often distracted by thinking what we are going to say next.
* During the time when the other person is talking, you are distracted by other thoughts or ideas.
* The words you're hearing may elicit such a strong negative emotional response, that you start blocking the message.
* It's difficult not to judge and screen the message we're hearing. We automatically tend to hear things we agree with, and screen out those things we don't want to hear.
* Sometimes, we may feel threatened by what the other person is saying and we block it out or refuse to really hear it.

* We may think we have heard, but the message may have been either ambiguous or unclear. Failure to clear up the real intent of the message may lead to miscommunication.
* You may be so wrapped up in your own thoughts and problems, that you are too preoccupied to really care, hear, or understand the message.

We've observed some conversations between adults which are almost comical in illustrating how these factors can destroy effective communication. In an extreme case, not listening can create the situation of two simultaneous but different conversations. One person says something, another responds with something completely unrelated to the first comment, the first person continues their prior line of thought and so it goes. An uninvolved observer will probably notice that there are really two quite separate and unrelated conversations but neither of the participants may really be aware of this fact — they're not listening! To assist you in the process of becoming a better listener, refer to Box 2 and try and apply some of these suggestions.

The Importance of Sending Clear Messages. Communication can break down because the speaker fails to send clear messages. The message may be mixed, ambiguous, or just plain unclear. Consider the following exchange between husband and wife as an example: Wife: "Can we afford a vacation this year?" Husband: "Where would you like to go?" (Note how the husband responded to a different question than the one asked.) "Oh, I don't know, anywhere I guess just as long as it's away from the farm." (Wife would really like to go back East to visit her parents, but is afraid to say so for fear it will be too expensive or that her husband will turn down the vacation option if he knew what she had in mind.) Husband responds with, "Sounds like a good idea — let's wait and see how things go." At best, this conversation reflects a diversion to a slightly different issue, avoidance, reluctance to express true feelings, and a "put-it-off" attitude which may preclude the couple ever getting it together so they could get a few highly needed days away from the grind of the farm.



"Some day, the farm will be mine? Pop, you've been telling me that since I was a little boy! When? *When* will it be mine?"

Box 3. The Art of Listening

When I ask you to listen to me, I am not asking for your advice.
When I ask you to listen to me, I am not asking for your explanations.
When I ask you to listen to me, I am not asking for you to solve my problems.
When I ask you to listen to me, I am not asking for your judgement.
When I ask you to listen to me, I am not blaming you for my problems.
When I ask you to listen to me, I am asking you to be with me, to hear me, to let me work things out for myself.
When I ask you to listen to me, I am asking you to trust me

so that I can feel free
to share with you
my feelings,
my hopes,
my concerns,
my questions,
my confusion,
so that I can feel free
to share with you
Me.
And I in turn will listen to you.

Lilly J. Walker

Not speaking up and saying your mind provides another example of ambiguity caused by, in this case, not communicating. We know a couple who were married for 40 years. Two or three times a month the wife fixed home-made potato soup for lunch. The husband dutifully kept eating his potato soup. She was astounded when he mentioned in a casual conversation, after 40 years of eating potato soup, that he really hated it.

Although the potato soup example relates to a relatively trivial matter, it is surprising how many couples are reluctant to share their true feelings and reactions with their spouse. Naturally, all of us are concerned about not hurting or threatening the ones we love. Open and honest communication of feelings can and should occur in a non-threatening and nonjudgemental context. Ultimately, the open sharing advocated here will enrich your marriage rather than threaten it. Some of the suggestions presented in Box 4 may be helpful in your efforts to send clear messages when you communicate.

Positive Approaches to Conflict Resolution. Farming is one of the few occupations where father and son, mother and daughter, are working together in the operation of the same business. The farm family lives and works together. The closeness of a farm family offers special advantages and certain challenges. The advantages

Box 4. Guidelines for Sending Clear Messages

- Be direct and honest. Say what you mean in simple and direct language.
- Don't avoid talking about something important to you just because you fear how the other person will respond. Discuss the issue in a non-threatening way, and the other person is more likely to respond without feeling threatened.
- Use descriptive and precise language. Be specific in describing your thoughts rather than general.
- Be alert to whether the other person has heard you. Giving and receiving feedback are important in listening and in sending clear messages. If you suspect the other person doesn't understand — ask them if they see the point you're trying to make.
- Try to be open, honest, and direct in the messages you send. Remember, "honesty is the best policy" for effective communication.
- Don't be afraid to say "no." If you feel like saying no to a request, do it. Explain the reasons for your decision. It will help the other person understand (and accept) your position.
- Avoid excessive "noise" in your messages. Everything gets lost on a bulletin board cluttered with messages. Similarly, if conversations are cluttered with an endless stream of trivia, an important message may not be heard.
- Describe your feelings by name, action, or figure of speech. (i.e. "I feel sad." "I feel like crying." "I feel down in the dumps.")
  The description will help communicate your feelings without ambiguity.
- Stay on the issue. Don't divert the conversation to something you would rather be talking about. Stay on topic.
- Don't be afraid of arguments. "Controlled agruments" can be constructive if they are handled properly. In an argument never, "go for the jugular." You know from experience the tolerance level of your spouse and his-her weakest points. Don't let the heat of the moment tempt you into bringing out the "big guns" just to win a small point. A "friendly disagreement" can be useful in helping you understand the other person's point of view.
- Listen to your own body language. If your words and body language don't agree, reformulate your verbal message so that it is in agreement what your body is telling you.
- Try to be assertive without being aggressive. Stick up for your own rights without attacking the rights of others.
- Consider saying the same thing in two different ways. It increases the chances of listener understanding. Every good public speaker appreciates the wisdom of the old adage "First tell an audience what you're going to tell them. Then, tell it to them. Finish by telling them what you said."
- Describe other people's behavior without evaluation (i.e. "Please let me finish", rather than, "Can't you listen to me just once?"

are too numerous to list. One of the major benefits is certainly the opportunity to develop a sense of family togetherness, support, and strength. On the negative side, too much togetherness can create a climate favourable to the development of family conflict.

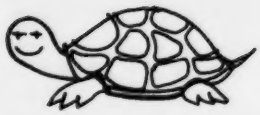
The likelihood of conflict on the family farm is further intensified under periods of high stress. Sometimes, stress can damage our relationships with those we love most. How can a farm family deal with the inevitable conflict that stress brings, or with problems in a farm-operating arrangement with paents or relatives?

Dealing with conflict should, of course, begin with open and effective communication. Does the other person really understand how you feel? Do you understand their position? It's surprising how often conflict and resentment can simmer on the back burner and boil away the special flavour of the closest relationships.

Taking the steps necessary to send open, clear, non-threatening messages, and also learning to become a more effective listener will provide the groundwork on which to construct a more helpful approach to farm conflicts. In fact, it might be argued that conflict resolution is impossible without this type of communication and listening. If you don't know how the other person really feels, or if you don't understand the reasons for their position, the attainment of a successful compromise which satisfies both parties becomes especially difficult.

When thinking about that disagreement with your spouse or the problem between you and a relative in the operation of the farm, keep in mind that not all conflicts are destructive. Some conflicts can actually produce beneficial effects. Conflicts help make you more aware of a problem in a relationship which needs attention. When conflicts increase our awareness of these problems, constructive solutions are more likely to follow. Another interesting aspect of conflicts is that they can actually lead to better decision making. Disagreement between father and son, for example, in how to operate the farm may actually cause decisions to be thought through more carefully than would have been the case without the conflict. Some people even enjoy a certain amount of conflict in their lives. It makes life more interesting and can be fun if not taken too seriously.

Most of us can feel when a conflict stops being constructive and starts producing destructive effects. Generally, conflicts are destructive when they weaken a relationship, when they attack mutual trust, or when they leave you unsatisfied with how the conflict was "resolved."



How do you typically react to conflicts? Dr. David Johnson has suggested that people show different styles of facing conflicts (Johnson, 1981). Some of us are like the **Turtle** — we withdraw into our shells to avoid conflicts. Turtles believe it is easier to avoid or withdraw from a conflict than to face it.

Others are like **Sharks** — they try to overpower their opponents. Achieving the desired goal is more important to the shark than the relationship. The shark is not concerned with the needs of other people. They assume that all conflicts are settled in the same way — someone wins and someone loses. Naturally, they want to be the winner.

Johnson describes some people as **Teddy Bears.** These are the individuals who value the relationship more than the goal of the conflict. Teddy Bears have a great need to always be accepted and liked by other people; they think conflict should be avoided in the place of absolute harmony. They're afraid that if the conflict continues, someone will get hurt.

Another type of conflict pattern is that of the **Fox.** Foxes show moderate concern for their own goals, but they are also concerned about their relationships with other people. They tend to seek a compromise. They are willing to sacrifice some of their goals in order to save a relationship and achieve the common good.

Lastly, Johnson talks about the **Owl.** Owls very highly value their own goals and place the same high value on their relationships. A conflict is viewed like any other problem — something to be solved. Owls try to achieve a solution which meets the goals of both parties in the conflict. Owls are unsatisfied until a solution is found that is completely satisfactory to everyone's goals and desires.

One could argue that the styles of the Turtle, and the Shark are often destructive to adequate conflict resolution. The withdrawal shown by the Turtle prevents resolving the conflict. Contrary to what the Turtle may think, the conflict won't go away by ignoring it. The Shark presents an equally destructive pattern. They're out for blood. They want to win, and they care little about the cost of winning to the relationship.

Teddy Bear's are like the Turtle in having a strong dislike for any conflict, and in wishing to avoid conflict. However, unlike the Turtle, Teddy Bear's do not withdraw completely from conflict. They often place themselves in the role of "family peace maker" and take an active role in trying to smooth out bad feelings between the participants in a conflict.

The Fox is a perfect politician. He/she understands the art of the political compromise. The Fox will sacrifice some of his/her goals in order to reach a half-way point which is mutually agreeable.

The Owl has high expectations for life and conflict resolution. Using a cool, logical, and rational approach, the Owl diligently searches for that perfect solution which will make the conflict disappear.

In taking an initial look at some of your own family conflicts, it may be useful to analyze your own conflict resolution style and also that of the other person(s) involved in the conflict. If you're a Turtle or a Shark, your personal style is guaranteed to create more problems than it will solve. For the Turtle, it's critical to start facing interpersonal conflicts. The Shark must learn to stop going in for the kill. If you're a Shark, realize that, in the long run, you'll probably succeed more in getting what you want and do less damage to your family relationships if you force yourself to be a bit more agreeable, to see the other person's point of view, and consider giving just a litle to that point of view. Making just a small initial, reasonable concession is the first step.

Hopefully, every family has it's Teddy Bear. If your family is missing this delightful creature, consider assuming the role yourself on occasion. The Teddy Bear is the friendly, nonthreatening mediator who shows others how potentially destructive conflicts can be resolved without lingering hostility. Farm wives frequently find themselves cast in this role. There is, unfortunately, a sometimes heavy price associated with being a Teddy Bear. When conflicts linger unresolved or worsen, the Teddy Bear may become unbearably stressed. Take a look at your own family dynamics. Are your own "shark-like" behaviors causing unwanted stress for a loved one who only wants everyone in the family to get along and love each other?

The Fox and the Owl each show many desirable conflict-resolution traits. If you're a Fox, you probably already have reduced many of your conflicts through the artful practice of compromise. Owls can also reach a successful solution to compromise, but they face more potential problems than the Fox. Owls keep looking for that one "perfect" solution that will keep everybody completely happy. Sometimes, such a solution simply does not exist. If you're an Owl, it will be helpful to your conflict-resolution style to consider more compromises. Naturally, if a "perfect" solution exists, use it. Otherwise, consider meeting the other person half way — it shows your respect and love without violating your own principles.

What about the other person's conflict style? You can be the most well-meaning Teddy Bear or Fox, but if you are dealing with a resolute Turtle or Shark, conflict resolution remains difficult, if not impossible.

Some of the communication guidelines discussed earlier are also applicable here. Using direct, open, and non-threatening communication, you can encourage a Turtle to face their conflicts. Similarly, if after determining that you yourself are not causing the lion's share of the disagreement, you can bring a Shark's behavior out in the open for discussion. It's difficult changing the behavior of a human Shark, but not impossible.

At a stress management workshop, one farmer shared his own approach to resolving farm operating conflicts with his father. The communication patterns used by this farmer were so reflective of sound conflict-resolution principles, that we'd like to share his approach here. The farmer, we'll call him Ted, was caught in the classic farm conflict between the "old way" of farming and the "new ways." The father discounted these "new hair-brained" ideas from the "fancy colleges" and insisted on doing things his own way. After farming for 40 years he "knew a thing or two about farming."

In many ways, the behavior of Ted's father was like that of a Shark. The conflict could be resolved by doing things his way. For years, Ted would make a suggestion for change, his father would discount the idea, and things would go on as usual. Being a classic Shark, the father was unaware of the lingering resentment his behavior caused in his son. Ted's wife, (perhaps acting as a Teddy Bear), suggested that he get his feelings out on the table and share them with his father.

Ted tackled the problem by having a heart-to-heart conversation with his Dad and bringing his own feelings out in the open. He started this conversation by saying something he had never told his father before — that he respected him and had learned a great deal about farming from him over the years. Ted proceeded to explain his own feelings about his Dad's unwillingness to try new ideas and to give Ted more of an independent hand in making farm operating decisions. "Could we try a compromise?", Ted asked. "Let's try my idea on a small scale. After harvest, we'll compare yields. We'll let the difference decide what we should do next year."

Perhaps because of the positive and non-threatening tone in which Ted's feelings were shared with his father, or because the father saw for the first time how he was

Box 5. Strategies to Help Resolve Conflicts

- Initiate open and honest discussion about the conflict.
- Be assertive but not aggressive. Don't be afraid to state your own position, but do it in a non-threatening way without attacking the other person.
- Communicate the idea that even though you disagree with their views, you still love them as a person. (This is similar to the idea of telling a child that even though you may not like some bad behavior, you still love the child.)
- Again, affirm your positive feelings for the other person. This will often open the door to more acceptance on their part. Your positive affirmation of them removes some of the threat from the disagreement and makes them more open to change.
- Don't be reluctant to consider compromise. Meet them half-way.
- Suggest that the other person consider a compromise. Find a common ground of agreement. Use it to help resolve the conflict.
- Consider the use of humour to help defuse the tension in arguments.
- If you're a father working with your adult son on the farm, take a long hard look at your own behavior. Is it causing problems for your son? Are you giving your son enough freedom to be his own person? Have you ever sat down with your son and talked about it?
- Every argument seems to have at least two "innocent victims" who are each suffering a "wrong" from the other. Examine your own behavior. Are you being unreasonable or unflexible? Remember, "the tree that bends is less likely to break."
- Remember, constructive conflict resolution begins with your actions, feelings, skills, and willingness to change.
- Outline a plan of action to resolve a particular conflict. What are you going to do to try and resolve the conflict? How do you expect the other to respond? What will you do if they don't behave in the expected way?
- Keep conflict resolution efforts constructive. Gently challenge their views, but never threaten their person.
- Initially, you can begin your conflict resolution efforts by building a mutual climate of trust. Work together with the other person on a joint cooperative effort. Cooperative interaction builds trust and has a powerful positive effect on the relationship between two people.
- Again, by becoming more of a friend to the other person, some conflicts may be automatically lessened.
- Refrain from "labeling" the other person's position. If you label their ideas as "wrong", "simplistic", or "ridiculous", it will elicit an equally negative reaction from the other person and may cause them to entrench.
- Avoid "no-win" situations where, even if you win, the relationship costs are too high a price to pay. Is the issue of the conflict really worth the grief it may be causing?
- Define the conflict. Actually write out the issues on a piece of paper. Think small. The more limited the definition of the conflict, the easier it will be to resolve. Small is easy — large is hard.

refusing to allow his son to grow up and assume adult responsibility, the father did make what seemed like a reasonable concession. Ted left the conversation with very positive feelings. In his own mind, a strong positive start had been made in resolving the father/son conflict. Ted's father, on the other hand, also left the conversation with some positive effects — he had more of an awareness of his son's feelings and how some of his own behaviors had been sources of pain to his son. If conflict is a source of stress on your farm, your personal stress management program should include steps to actively reduce these sources of tension. The additional guidelines presented in Box 5 may help your efforts.

Family Enrichment

Establishing or strengthening open and caring communication within your family will nourish the love you share for each other. In the same way, making an active attempt to reduce family conflicts can produce similar effects. The family will be stronger for the effort and a strong family love provides one of the best stress buffers.

What are some additional things which can help reach the goal of increasing the binding and protective love shared by your family? The many possible answers to this question could probably fill another workbook. Many of the ideas and suggestions which we have in mind and those which have been suggested to us by farm families are relatively little things. They are little in the sense that they are easily done, they take little effort, and on the surface they seem almost trivial. Yet, they can be powerfully effective in reinforcing the strength of your family.

For starters, consider this question: How long has it been since you told your spouse that you love her/him? These three simple little words are among the most powerful in any language. They take very little energy to say, yet it's amazing the difficulty many of us have in producing them.

In the musical "Fiddler on the Roof", after a long marriage, the wife asked her husband if he loved her. He was dumbfounded by the question. Didn't his every action show that he did? His reply was "of course I do." "Then say it if you really mean it", was her response!

Some other ideas for family enrichment are presented here. Consider how you might adopt some of these, or your own ideas, towards the goals of enriching the love you share with your family.

* Tell your spouse or children when you feel they have done a good job.
* Thank them every time they do something nice or considerate for someone else in the family.
* Get into the habit of giving compliments. A sincere compliment can provide a great deal of pleasure to the recipient.
* Get into the habit of being able to accept a compliment without feeling the need to discount it. When your husband says he likes your dress, don't reply with "Oh, this old thing?" Accept the compliment along with your thanks.
* Use more words of love and acts of love. Do something a little extra nice for someone in your family. Give a small, unexpected gift on occasion, make an especially well-liked meal or dessert, or imagine that you are back in your courtship days and write a love letter to your husband/wife.
* Don't be afraid to express your love through touch. We all could use several hugs a day. Don't be stingy in giving them — they're free.
* Laughter can help heal hurt and relieve tension. Help your family see the humour in a stressful situation.
* Nourish your family's religious beliefs and practices. Prayer is a proven remedy for tension.
* Turn your house into a home. Create a home environment that soothes rather than stresses. It doesn't have to include a major renovation — even simple changes like a coat of paint, throwing out some clutter, or experimenting with different furniture arrangements can add to the "comfort quotient" of your home.
* Stress can be contagious. If you're feeling tense or angry — try not to complain too much in front of your spouse or family.
* Try and be more considerate of other members of your family. Are you, for example, expecting your wife to be "superwoman?" Could you be helping out a little more around the house?
* Think of some playful and recreational activities which everyone in your family can enjoy together. Ideas here are limited only by the imagination, they might include things like curling, cross-country skiing, jogging, grooming and showing prize stock at show, short family trips or holidays...etc.
* Remember, the person who enjoys the strongest relationships never thinks about what they're getting — They concentrate instead on what they're giving!
* Always be interested in the other person. Your interest in them shows them that you care.
* If you feel your family is too isolated on the farm and not seeing enough people, invite some friends over to share an evening or weekend meal. Encourage your children to invite a classmate for a "sleep-over."
* Be accepting of the natural rhythm of other members of your family. Don't burden them with expectations of being something or someone they're not.
* As well as being a parent and a lover, be a "best friend" to your family.

Activity 1: Assessing and Improving Communication

1. Stop and reflect about the patterns of communication in your family. List and identify examples of family communication patterns that are positive and productive:

2. List examples of family communication patterns that could be improved:

3. For each example, identify whether it is a problem in:
   a) not enough communication
   b) unclear communication
   c) poor listening skills
   d) conflicts with others
   e) something else (describe)
4. Refer to the various boxes provided throughout this chapter and select one or two suggestions that can help you change some of the family communication patterns that need improving:

Problem Pattern	Category	Intended Changes
e.g. I tend to interrupt	c	Be patient Let them finish

Activity 2: Understand Conflict Resolution

1. Identify your conflict resolution style. (Turtle, Teddy Bear, Shark, Fox or Owl):
2. List the benefits and costs to you of this strategy:

   Benefits: _____

   Costs: _____

3. Share with all the members of your family your perceptions of your conflict strategy and its benefits and costs.
4. List all the members of your family and beside each family member's name, identify the conflict strategy you believe they usually practice:
5. Together, the family members should share their perceptions and how they feel this affects the family.

Activity 3: Enriching Your Family

List each member of your family and identify two or three ways that you can compliment and affirm each other. Have everyone in the family work at this brainstorming session. Ask each member of the family to give everyone in the family a compliment daily. After two weeks, discuss this exercise as a family.

Summary

1. Of the six major types of farm stress, social and family factors were found to be most highly related to overall stress and symptom levels.
2. Farm families are recognizing the importance of building communication and conflict-resolution skills. These efforts can help reduce stress. The family can be both a source of stress and a protection from stress. Improving family strength thus reduces stress and helps provide protection from other sources of stress.
3. The first step in improving family relations can be to increase the amount of significant communication shared by the family. Guidelines are presented to help your family do a more effective job of finding the time to really communicate.
4. Some problems in communication are really problems in listening. Listening is a difficult art that requires attention, concentration, interest, perception, and memory. Guidelines for more effective listening were presented in the chapter.
5. Effective communication also requires sending clear messages. Guidelines were presented to help sharpen effectiveness in giving clear and unambiguous messages.
6. People show different styles of responding to conflicts. By adopting more characteristics of the Teddy Bear, the Fox, and the Owl, we can improve our abilities to resolve family conflicts.
7. Suggestions were presented for family living which can enrich and strengthen the family.

6.

Arming Yourself Against Stress

The FARM Model of Stress Management

"Exercise helps relax me. In the summer, I run. Once we have snow, I switch to cross-country skiing."

"I still have the ability to laugh and it helps."

"I refuse to worry about the work I didn't get done today — it'll be there waiting for me tomorrow!"

Each of these three comments from farmers reflects different ways of arming yourself against stress. In this chapter, we would like to consider a variety of approaches to building your physical and psychological resistance to stress. Building these defense mechanisms against stress can help break the common "stress-response-stress" cycle where stress causes a response which further intensifies stress.

Stress-induced illness is a good example of this cycle. Imagine a situation where workload is at its peak, perhaps during harvest time. You are expriencing high levels of stress in response to these work pressures, physical resistance to illness may be lowered, and you come down with a bad cold or the flu. The illness slows you down, the work pressures may intensify in your mind, stress is increased, and recovery from the illness is delayed. You're caught in the middle of an unpleasant "stress-response-stress' cycle!

Start by Taking Your Body in For a Check-up.

One of your first steps in building physical resistance to stress should be to have a complete physical examination by your family physician. Catching an illness or potential medical problem in the early stages facilitates treatment and may prevent the development of a life-threatening condition. Most of us take better care of our cars and tractors than our bodies. Taking care of your body is like giving it a "tune-up" — it runs more efficiently, and will serve you longer.

Proper Nutrition

We wouldn't dream of using low quality or the wrong fuel for our machinery, yet sometimes we pay less than careful attention to what we put in our bodies. Your body can only use the materials you decide to give it.

Stress can cause serious disruptions in our normal eating patterns. It has been shown to be involved in both overeating and malnutrition. Some people eat in response to stress — they use eating as a way to relax and forget their problems. Other experience a decrease in appetite in response to stress. They may be so "busy" in response to perceived work pressures that proper nutrition suffers.

One of the best signs of nutritional problems is the presence of significant underweight or overweight. How does your own weight compare to the normal ranges for a person of your sex, height, and body frame? Your physician would be in a good position to answer this question during your next physical. If you want to lose weight, start by cutting back on sugars, fats, and alcohol. Eat less, but highly nutritious foods. Above all, avoid fad diets.

"She's been feeling poorly and, now that the crops are in, I think she should have a checkup."

Some suggestions for maintaining healthy nutrition include: eating a variety of different foods, using more grain foods (especially whole grain because of the fibre), avoiding too much salt, eating hearty in the morning and lighter at night, using fewer rich desserts and thick cream sauces, and cutting down on the amount of fat in the diet by using lean meat, draining the meat drippings, and using a low-fat milk.

Excellent sources of free material on nutrition are readily available from your provincial departments of agriculture and health and welfare.

How are you Sleeping?

Are you sleeping more or less than is right for your own body? Stress can cause or aggravate both oversleeping and undersleeping. Sleeping too much can occur in response to either too little stress or too much stress. In the case of too much stress, the person may be using excessive sleep as an escape from stressors, or the highly stressed person may have difficulty getting to sleep, may sleep fitfully, and may be bothered by nightmares. Generally, most of us need from six to nine hours of sleep each night to feel rested.

Leading sleep experts suggest that medication should be used to alleviate sleep problems only as a last resort. In fact, in the long-run, the evidence indicates that sleep-inducing medications may cause as many sleep problems as they solve.

What then, can a person who is having stress-related sleep problems do about it? Generally, the best advice involves taking steps to physically relax. Suggestions for relaxation, discussed in the next chapter, are particularly relevant for creating a state of physical and mental relaxation which facilitates improved sleep patterns.

In some cases where too little sleep is not caused by insomnia, the solution to the problem can be even more straightforward. When you are feeling highly stressed from work pressures, there is a tendency to "rob Peter to pay Paul" — we cut into our normal sleeping time to keep working. The person who has fallen into this pattern often ends up like the classic workaholic — they work more, but get less done. Sleep deficiency lowers productivity. If appropriate to your own lifestyle, resolve to increase your productivity by always trying to start each day refreshed after allowing yourself to get the sleep-time you know to be required for your peak performance.

The Role of Physical Exercise

Physical exercise should be an essential component of every personal stress management program. Even though farming is one of the top occupations in the amount of physical exercise, modern farming certainly involves less physical exertion than in earlier times. Many farmers will themselves be the first to admit that spending all day in a tractor cab isn't exactly all that's required to maintain top physical condition.

Why be concerned with including exercise as an essential component of a stress-management program? Basically, exercise can build our resistance to the effects of stress by helping to maintain the strength and physical condition of our body. This is just another way of saying that exercise is healthy. It helps keep our bodies strong and functioning effectively. Also, exercise has been described as "nature's tranquilizer." People who engage in daily aerobic exercise (running, jogging, walking, skiing, etc.) report that a calming effect is produced. Some researchers believe that exercise produces these calming effects by releasing a naturally occurring tranquilizer-like chemical in the brain.

It may sound paradoxical, but you'll have more energy after exercise than you did before. Naturally, before beginning a program of regular aerobic exercise, you should talk about your plans with your family physician to make sure that you don't have any medical condition which precludes exercise.

A desire to include exercise as part of your stress management efforts starts with making a simple commitment to exercise regularly. If you're not willing to exercise for 15 to 20 minutes at least every other day, maybe you shouldn't do it at all. There is strong medical evidence that irregular exertion can do more harm than good. (The increase in cardiac deaths during snow removal efforts is probably a good example.) Make sure you start slowly and gradually build up. Don't make the mistake of pushing yourself too hard. Know your limits and respect them. Feeling tired after exercise rather than energized is probably an indication that you've done too much. Make sure to give yourself both a warm-up and a cool-down time. Spend about five to ten minutes warming up before exercising and allow the same amount of time to cool-down afterwards. One good idea is to systematically try and stretch your muscles every day. There are a number of excellent aerobic dance records available which can be used to apply this type of muscle stretching exercise. Try and exercise with other family members or friends. Exercise is more fun with others. On some occasions, you might prefer to exercise alone to provide a private time for physical exertion accompanied by mental reflection.

If you have never used exercise as a way of coping with stress, why not give it a try? You might be surprised at what it can do!

"I'm saving something for my old age — sleep!"

Eliminating Negative Coping Mechanisms

As we travel the various roads and turns of life, it's easy to acquire coping strategies which are counterproductive. They are negative because even though they may bring initial relief from stress, they can damage our health, or create more stress than they resolve. Examples of negative coping mechanisms include smoking, drinking of alcoholic beverages to relax, use of "recreational" drugs, and overeating. In each case it's obvious how the behavior can damage our health. In some cases the chronic use of tranquilizers to control your stress may fall in the same category. The medication provides an easy-way out without directly addressing the source of the problem.

Other behaviors which are not obviously health damaging may also fall into the category of negative coping mechanisms — you think the behavior helps you relax, but it is actually increasing stress. Watching the evening news as part of your daily wind-down procedure may, for example, be causing more stress than relaxation. After seeing the stream of calamitous events that usually passes for a news program, you may end up spending part of the night worrying about whether morning will even come. Another example is found in the "recreational" behaviors frequently chosen by highly tense and competitive individuals. (This is the Type A pattern we have all heard so much about.) These persons are frequently workaholics, have a high desire not to "waste" even a second of their day, and are driven by a high sense of competition in everything they do. (There is a high occurrence of heart disease in people showing the Type A behavior pattern.) So, what does the typical Type A person do to relax? It's not unusual to find them involved in athletic activities, showing the same sense of competitive urgency!

No one pretends that changing negative coping mechanisms is an easy process. It is, however, a worthwhile one. You might begin the process for yourself by stopping to reflect about your own coping mechanisms. Are some of the things you use to cope with stress really counterproductive? If you identify some negative coping mechanisms, the process of removing them starts with making the mental resolution to replace them with positive copers. In many cases, once you make the effort, you'll find that substituting positive copers provides a natural and highly effective way of getting rid of stress.

Recognizing Your Limits

Earlier, we suggested that people show different stress styles. Some can thrive on high pressure, others are more comfortable with fewer demands. Recognizing your personal stress limits can be a powerful tool to help keep the pressures within levels you can accommodate. If you feel that your own stress exceeds your comfort level, a good way to remedy the situation is to examine your life for stressors which can be easily eliminated. A surprising number of pressures fall in this category.

Why do so many people end up overextending themselves? One reason lies in the unwillingness to say "no". If your own stress comfort level has been exceeded, consider saying "no" to new stressors or "no more" to some of your current ones.

The considerable demands placed on a farm woman because of off-farm employment might represent a good working example of how the process could work. While saying "no more" to the job may not be a possibility because of economic considerations, saying "no" to still doing all of the housework remains a distinct possibility. Could the children be helping out more? Could (We can hear the men groaning already!) your husband be of more assistance around the house?

Examine your own life. Are there some family pressures which could be shared more cooperatively by other members of the family? What about outside demands on your time? Maybe this isn't the year to increase your involvement in a farm organization. Weigh the pro's and con's. If the activity is highly valued or provides diversion, relaxation, or supportive social contacts, you might not want to give it up. If not, consider letting go. Saying "no" to more stress is one way of recognizing and respecting your limits.

Learning to Manage Stress through Goal Setting

Sometimes, a personal sense of stress can occur because our goals are fuzzy or nonexistent. To use a nautical analogy, if you don't know what you really value and you're not sure of your goals, you're like a ship without a rudder. Without a destination, no wind can favor your ship.

There is an intimate psychological relationship between personal goals and motivation. Goals provide the energy for motivating our behavior. Without goals, life becomes an endless treadmill. We do things only because "we have to." Problems can arise from not having any goals or by misperceiving our true goals and values.

In some situations, we experience a disproportionate stress reaction from a stressor which has blocked the attainment of a goal which, if given careful consideration, would be fairly low on our list of priorities and values. An often-used suggestion for adopting a frame of mind conducive to identifying your true values and goals is to

start by imagining that you had only one year to live. What would be most important to you under these circumstances? How would you live your life differently than at present?

We are reminded here of the farm man near retirement age. After spending his entire life farming, he was in danger of loosing his farm. Without denying this to be a major personal tragedy, it is doubly tragic that the economic circumstances caused so much damage to his self-esteem. Feeling like a personal failure, he had even considered suicide. We asked him if he would sacrifice his family in order to save the farm. "Of course not" was his instant reply. Family was obviously more important than the farm. It turned out that he and his wife had successfully raised four children who had gone on to establish their own occupations and families. The damage to his self-esteem (and the resulting stress) was reduced by his awareness that he had, in fact, succeeded admirably in fulfilling his most important goal in life. While this realization didn't remove the pain caused by his financial situation, it did lessen the personal damage.

Take some time to better understand or establish your own values, goals, and life priorities. The ideas presented in Box 6 may be helpful to these efforts.

Box 6. The Art of Goal-Setting and Priorizing

GOAL-SETTING
"The art of planning long-term and short-term positive goals that provide a direction to your life."

P — Priorize your goals
E — Establish your plan
R — Record your activity
S — Summarize your achievement
O — Observe your progress
N — Nurture your success

PRIORIZE YOUR GOALS:

- Priorize your goals in terms of your personal needs and involvements, recognizing that for a balanced life you need to establish personal goals in the four quadrants of your life (Work, Family, Personal, and Social).
- Remember that goals should be personally desirable and reflect what you want for yourself (not what others may want for you.)

ESTABLISH YOUR PLAN:

- Establish a plan of concrete, specific steps and strategies for attaining your goals. Ask yourself two questions: "How can I reach my goal?" and, "What are the actions I need to take in order to succeed?"
- Write down your plan. Goals are most effective when they are written, measurable, attainable, and challenging.
- Include in your plan your methods of evaluating your progress and performance.

RECORD YOUR ACTIVITY:

- Initially measure your current level of performance in order to establish a baseline.
- Regularly record all of your actions that are related to achieving your goal.
- Keep a written record of your daily performance.

SUMMARIZE YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS:

- At regular intervals, evaluate your performance by summarizing what you have done.
- If you have achieved the steps or mini-goals of your plan, reward yourself. Rewards can be anything you personally value (e.g. money, time, attending special events, etc.).
- If you have not achieved your goal, evaluate the blocks that are preventing you from succeeding. Consider establishing smaller steps (or mini-goals), using different rewards, or reviewing your system of recording your activities.

NURTURE YOUR SUCCESS:

- Accentuate the positive. Concentrate on what you have accomplished. Build your progress by emphasizing those actions and attitudes that have helped you succeed.
- Affirm yourself. Pat yourself on the back. Announce to others which goals you have achieved so that they can share in your success.

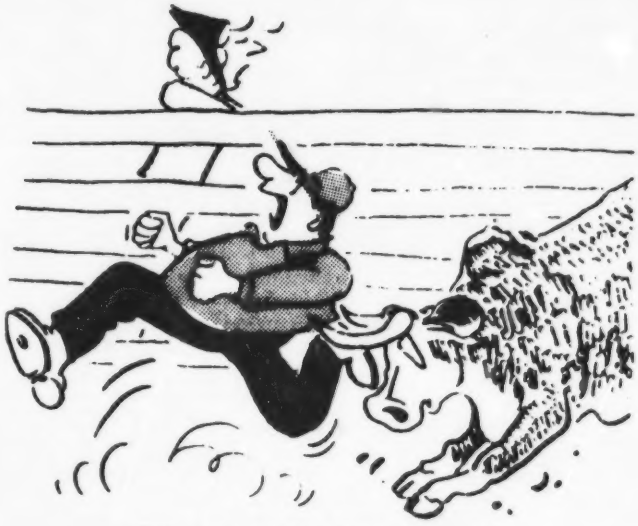
Using Laughter to Arm Yourself Against Stress

Developing or enriching a sense of humour can provide a significant protection from stress. The body seems to respond to laughter in much the same way that it responds to exercise. Laughter provides a physical release which is tension reducing. The ability to laugh is a great gift.

Try playing "ain't it funny" instead of "ain't it awful." The latter will make you more tense, the former can be relaxing. Encourage yourself to appreciate the incongruities of life. We're reminded of a joke recently making the rounds among some farmers. One farmer asks another: "What would you do if you won the 6/49?" The other farmer answered, "I guess maybe I'd just keep farming until the money was all gone."

Stressful times are those most likely to cause a natural decrease in your ability to see the humour in life. This is why it is particularly important to remind yourself of the power of laughter. Humour can soften the pain of even the most stressful events. Take grief, for example. In the grieving process many people find comfort in recalling and sharing with others some pleasant, amusing, or downright funny events or behaviors related to the deceased person. While the smiles may be faint, their very presence helps provide comfort.

There are a number of things you can try doing to increase your "humour quotient." Keep your eyes and ears open for a good joke and share it with others. Even if you can't get all the way through a joke without forgetting something, like the punch line, give it a try. Others will generally enjoy your efforts. Humour may come the easiest if you don't actually try to be funny. Just start noticing and enjoying life's inconsistencies. Then tell others about it. Try changing your complaints into jokes. Whenever you hear yourself complaining, try to retell the story in a way that makes it enjoyable. Try drawing a cartoon of one of your present problems.



"I'll come back when you're not busy."

Activity: Arming Yourself Against Stress

Using some of the suggestions presented in this chapter as well as your own ideas, make some plans to arm yourself against stress.

(1) Are you taking good care of your body? (Specify why or why not.)

(2) List here any areas related to care of your body which you feel need improvement (e.g. nutrition, sleep, exercise, negative coping mechanisms):

(3) Identify specific things you want to do to improve how you're looking after your body:

I will improve my nutrition by:

I will improve sleep habits by:

I will improve exercise habits by:

Things I will do to help eliminate negative coping mechanisms:

(4) Reflect on your present stress limits. Ask yourself if taking on even one new responsibility (however small) will increase or decrease your efficiency and stress. Describe how you feel about your present stress limits — are you below, right at, or above your ideal limit? Why?

If you feel you are below or above your ideal limit, identify actions which can adjust your life to a more ideal comfort level (e.g. extra responsibilities if you are bored or understressed or specific ways to limit or reduce your stressors if you are overstressed):

(5) Use the guidelines in Box 6 as a working example to help you manage stress through Goal Setting:
What goals are most important to you? Make sure to include goals relating to the full person (e.g. work, family, personal, and social):

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

Set up a Goal Diary. Use your goal diary to keep everything in one place. It can contain the list of your immediate and longer term goals, the specifics of your plan to attain each of these goals, a continuing record of your goal-directed activities, and a summary of your achievements. Don't forget to reward yourself for each successful step toward a goal. Periodically, bring out your goal diary, update it, and notice the progress you are making in reaching your goals.

(6) Formulate some ways you will try to increase the "humour quotient" in your life or the life of your family:

Summary

1. Resistance to stress is increased by taking good care of your body. Yearly medical examinations are a good idea.
2. Proper nutrition, sleep, and exercise are important in building physical armour against stress.
3. Eliminating negative coping mechanisms improves your ability to resist stress.
4. It's important to know and respect your stress limits. Are there some ways you could say "no" or "no more" to some of your stressors?
5. Goal setting and priorizing can help you recognize what is really important in your life. Sometimes, distorted or misperceived priorities can be a source of stress.
6. Laughter and a sense of humour provide a strong armour against stress.

7.
Relaxing

The FARM Model of Stress Management

"We try to get away from the farm every year for a holiday, even if it's only for a few days."

"I haven't been off the farm overnight in the past 12 years."

These two contrasting comments represent farm lifestyles which can have important consequences for stress management. In fact, the individuals who made them at a farm stress management workshop showed remarkably different levels of stress. The first person seemed more relaxed and generally less stressed about farm life. Taking a regular holiday turned out to be only one of the things this family did to help moderate its stress. In the case of the second farmer, serious signs of stress, including marriage difficulties, were present. Taking a vacation is not a magic elixir for reducing stress — but it can help.

The nearest thing to an elixir which stress-management can suggest is relaxation. This is true because STRESS AND RELAXATION ARE INCOMPATIBLE. It is physically impossible to be stressed and relaxed at the same time!

The basis for this impossibility rests on how our nervous system works. The physiological responses observed in stress are produced by a part of our nervous system called the sympathetic division. When we are in a relaxed state, another part of our nervous system, the parasympathetic division, swings into action. Generally, these two division of the nervous sytem work in an "either-or" fashion. Only one division is active at a time. Thus when you are relaxed, the parasympathetic division of your nervous system is active in producing physiological responses which relax your body. On the other hand, when you are tense, the sympathetic division causes your body to produce the physical arousal associated with stress.

Learning to truly relax is one of the most powerful techniques of stress management. It has been suggested that we would be able to tolerate even high and chronic stress without health damaging consequences, if we periodically reduced the stress to more normal levels by relaxing. One is reminded of the tension on a spring. We can keep adding tension to the spring by winding it as long as we let it wind-down (relax) before adding more tension. If we keep adding tension without allowing for tension release, eventually the spring will break.

Our bodies seem to follow the same principle. It is chronic, UNRELIEVED, stress and tension that produces the damage. Without relaxation, our "tension baseline" keeps inching towards heaven. Relaxation lowers the tension baseline to a more normal level allowing the body to rest and restore itself for the next bout of sympathetic nervous system activity.

Interactions Between Mind and Body in Relaxation

Nowhere is the interplay between mind and body illustrated more clearly than in the study of the human relaxation response. One of us (JLW) spent a year in a research institute which specialized in the study of the relationship between mental and physical events associated with relaxation. The Institute's research activities showed that any relaxation strategy which produced physical relaxation also produced a calming mental effect. Similarly, techniques designed to produce mental calming also had the side-effect of producing physical relaxation. The implication is clear. There are two ways to provide the beneficial techniques of relaxation — physical and mental. The rest of this chapter will explore some of the options.

Producing Physical Relaxation

Progressive Relaxation: One of the best ways of producing physical relaxation is by using a set of procedures called Progressive Relaxation. Basically, it is nothing more than a systematic way of reducing the tension in all of the major muscle groups of your body.

Two equally effective forms of progressive relaxation techniques are frequently used. One approach involves progressively focusing your awareness on a major muscle group, becoming aware of the tension in those muscles, and then consciously trying to lower the tension. Once those muscles are relaxed, the process is repeated with other body parts. The second commonly used procedure is similar, but after attention is focused on the tension in

each body part, you start by actually increasing the tension, holding the increased tension for a few moments, and then releasing it to a new low level. This is a tensing, then letting go approach. Some people find that the first method is more effective for them. Others find the tensing-letting-go method to be more useful.

Either of these methods can be a highly effective way to physically relax. The beauty of these procedures is that they are simple, they don't require any fancy or expensive equipment, and with some daily practice they can become highly effective ways for you to relax and lower your tension level. Some people have become so efficient in relaxing with progressive relaxation techniques that after only a few minutes of relaxing, recordings from their muscles actually show a reduction in tension to a level which is difficult to record!

From 10 to 20 minutes seems to be the optimal time to spend in progressive relaxation. Most of us can't become very relaxed in less than ten minutes and after 20 to 30 minutes, further increases in muscle relaxation are minimal for most people. Start the procedure by finding a quiet place free from distractions and interruptions. Assume a comfortable, semi-reclining position (a recliner chair is ideal), and begin the relaxation routine. You may want to use the relaxation script provided in Box 7 to guide you in your relaxation efforts. It may be helpful to actually record the script (with appropriate pauses) and then play back the tape to guide you during your relaxation times.

Deep Breathing: This is another simple, but effective, approach to producing short-term physical relaxation. Simply take a very deep breath, hold it for five to eight seconds, then exhale deeply. The process can be repeated for several times. Try it now and notice what you feel.

To be most effective, you should really take in a good deep "belly-full" of air and then after the pause exhale just as deeply. What you'll notice when you do it is that there is a feeling of increased tension leading to unpleasantness as you hold the breath, followed by a pleasant feeling of tension-release while you exhale.

Deep breathing can be useful in stress management for two reasons. First, during stress our breathing may become shallow. Deep breathing counteracts this tendency. Secondly, when you hold your breath it generates tension (a sympathetic response). Exhaling releases this tension causing what physiologists refer to as a minor "parasympathetic rebound" phenomenon. Basically, the tension release activates parasympathetic responses which then continue for a time.

Try giving yourself a few deep breathing breaks every day. They can be particularly important in diffusing the stress that you notice during periods of high tension. The technique can be done anywhere without notice, is an effective short-term relaxation strategy, and is safe. We can think of only one rather tongue-in-cheek caution — if you hold your breath till you start turning blue, go back and read the directions again.

Box 7. Progressive Muscle Relaxation Procedure

This exercise can help you learn the skill of deep muscle relaxation. You may wish to record the following relaxation script and play it back during your relaxation periods.

Get comfortable...find a relaxed position and allow yourself to concentrate on these instructions:

Take in a deep breath through your nose...(dots indicate a pause) Close your eyes and let your body begin to relax...Take another deep breath and allow a pleasant feeling to descend over you...

Now start being aware of some of the sensations in your body...find the place in your body that is most tense...allow those muscles to go limp...let them relax...Begin to let all the muscles of your body go limp and relax...Get rid of whatever tension is left in your body...Focus again on your breathing...let the tension go out with each breathe...

Now be aware of the top of your head...allow a feeling of relaxation to start there...let that feeling of relaxation spread downward through your whole body...Allow all of the muscles of your forehead to relax...really feel the muscle giving up its hold...Feel your eyebrows sagging down...feel your eyelids relaxing...let your jaw muscles relax...now let all the muscles around the sides and back of your head relax fully and completely...now all the muscles of your head and face are relaxed...

Now, let the muscles of your neck relax...tense them only enough to hold your head upright and balanced in position...Let that feeling of relaxation spread into your throat and down the sides of your neck into your shoulders...allow your shoulders to become very heavy and sag downwards...

Begin to let the feeling of relaxation spread to your arms...feel it pass into your stomach muscles as they begin to relax...let your stomach muscles release their hold...

Begin now to relax the large muscles of your thighs...let them go pleasantly limp...your whole body is gradually becoming very pleasantly relaxed...Let the muscles of your calves relax and let that feeling spread into your feet...your whole body is feeling very comfortable and relaxed...

Be aware of the feeling of relaxation...Check your body to see if there is still a tense muscle... notice any tension and let it reduce its hold...let those tense muscles relax...Enjoy these sensations of very profound relaxation...Keep concentrating on these feelings of relaxation...remember what it feels like to be relaxed...when you feel ready...allow yourself all the time you want to bring your body back to its usual level of alterness. Start by wiggling your fingers and toes...move your legs and arms a little bit..shrug your shoulders...experience your body returning to its normal state...when you're ready, open your eyes...and allow your body to feel refreshed.

Massage: Active muscle massage can be highly effective in producing muscular relaxation. Even a few minutes of vigorous massage can produce an impressive feeling of relaxation. Try it with your spouse. Give him/her a neck, shoulder, or back rub. Ask them to do the same for you. Chances are they won't ask you to stop before you yourself are tired!

Hot Baths or Sauna: For many persons, nothing is quite as relaxing as a nice long bath. Besides giving a quiet private time, the soothing warmth of the water provides muscular relaxation. Hot tubs and saunas provide similar benefits. Don't be afraid of treating yourself to the luxury of a few extra minutes in the bathtub.

Exercise: We already considered the stress reduction effects of physical exercise. Paradoxically, we can actually relax ourselves by giving our body a good workout. Working within your own medically acceptable limits and beginning gradually, give exercise a chance as a valuable component of your relaxation efforts. Find something physical and fun to do. The possibilities are restricted only by your own imagination.

Biofeedback: Biofeedback is simply a form of muscle relaxation where electronic measuring equipment is used to give you feedback about the state of tension in your muscles. Usually a tone is used for feedback. When the tone rises in pitch, it means that your muscle tension is increasing and a lowering of the tone reflects a lowering of tension. Using these cues, the person in biofeedback uses thinking strategies to try and produce a very low level of muscle tension.

Although biofeedback can produce very effective states of relaxation, it has the drawback of requiring expensive equipment. Fortunately, research has generally shown that progressive relaxation (requiring no machinery) is about as effective in producing relaxation as biofeedback.

Take a Nap: A short mid-day rest can be an excellent prescription for lowering stress. Some of the most productive and hard-working men and women in the world take a daily mid-day nap. To borrow part of a jingle from a fast-food restaurant and apply it toward napping — "You deserve a break today."

Producing Mental Relaxation

Whether relaxation is produced through some of the physical methods considered above, or through mental strategies, the results are the same. Relaxation produces a physical slowing of your body and a decrease in bodily tension as well as causing your mind to feel at peace. Let's consider some "mental" strategies which can be used to produce relaxation.

Autogenic Training: Autogenic relaxation is similar to self-hypnosis. The word "autogenic" means that you apply it to yourself. The general idea is to assume a comfortable, supportive position, close your eyes, and repeat some self-instructions (e.g. my legs are warm) several times while you observe the feelings in the area of the body referred to in the instruction.

The idea of autogenic relaxation is very simple: You repeat to yourself a series of six self-instructions. As you say the words in your mind, you observe what is experienced in your body. The only task is to **observe:** you should not try to make it happen. Though you may find it difficult to adopt such a passive observing attitude, any other attitude generally interferes with the relaxation response. The following instructions are those typically used in autogenic relaxation:

1. My hands and arms are heavy and warm (5 times)
2. My legs and feet are heavy and warm. (5 times)
3. My breathing is even and deep. (10 times)
4. My heartbeat is calm and regular. (10 times)
5. My forehead is cool. (5 times)
6. When I open my eyes, I will remain relaxed and refreshed. (3 times)

During autogenic training, you should try to breathe deeply and evenly. Synchronize your instructions with slow exhalations. Feelings of heaviness, warmth, or lightness may be produced and are the key subjective signs of relaxation.

As is the case with the Progressive Relaxation strategies discussed earlier, be prepared to allow yourself some time and practice to really begin producing relaxation effects. The achievement of a full relaxation

"I've got my choice of relaxing and reading, watching a hockey game on TV or repairing machinery, and I'm going to head for the machinery shed this minute!"

response may require up to a month. The ideal situation is to practice one or two times each day. Once you become adept at relaxing, a full relaxation response can be quickly induced.

Using Imagery to Relax: This approach to relaxation involves allowing your mind to create images of things which make you feel calm and relaxed. This type of visualization or imagery can be an efficient method of relaxing and creating a positive frame of mind. It doesn't take long, and it can be used for brief periods in even the most trying situations.

One example of this type of mental relaxation imagery is the "two minute vacation." As you breathe slowly and deeply, close your eyes and imagine that your doing something you find very relaxing — maybe walking on the beach, listening to the sounds of the waves and feeling the cool fresh breeze blowing on your face. Or, maybe you're walking in the woods with the nice warm sun shining on you and you can hear the birds singing in the air. Imagine this type of personally relaxing experience for one or two minutes while you continue to mentally experience all of the details of the experience — the sights, sounds, smells, and mood. Continue to breathe deeply as you visualize this relaxing experience.

The process takes only a few minutes, but it can leave you feeling quite refreshed. Most of us use this type of visualization in our daily life (we call it daydreaming or fantasy). Few of us consciously use the process for the purpose of relaxation. Give it a try. Take yourself on a "two minute vacation."

Using Distractions to Relax

A simple break from our normal work routine can provide a refreshing reduction of stress. By mentally shifting gears, we come back to our work with renewed interest and vigor. In fact, research shows that sometimes the best way to solve a problem is to stop thinking about it and do something else. It's surprising how often a promising solution will occur to you when you later return to the problem.

In a way, even the mental imagery technique mentioned above represents a type of "distraction" technique. It helps get your mind off your worries and your mind thus produces less stress.

What are some other distraction relaxation strategies? Annual holidays should head the list! A holiday gives you a chance to really get away from your stressors both physically and mentally. It's amazing what happens to your outlook when you put a few hundred kilometres between you and your farm for a few days.

Vacations pose special problems for many farmers, particularly those with livestock. Preparing for the vacation can be a hassle, especially finding a reliable person to look after the animals. Once you're into day two of your holiday, you'll usually agree that it was worth the extra effort. If financial factors are preventing your family from taking a holiday, consider some low cost alternatives. Maybe that good friend with a lake cabin two hours away from your farm would be delighted to let your family use it just for his/her own piece of mind that it was being looked after during an otherwise vacant period.

Hobbies and recreational activities provide other excellent sources of mental relaxation. One of the marks of a highly stressed workaholic is often her/his lack of personal hobbies. If you don't already have a hobby, try and find something which you enjoy and which you find a pleasant and productive use of some of your spare time. Even the busiest person can usually find a little extra time to spend on a personally rewarding hobby. Recreational activities can combine both exercise, hobby, and social benefits. Curling is a good example.

Consider using the ideas in Box 8 as a start for a personal or family brain-storming session in which you use your imagination to come up with some new, enjoyable, relaxing diversions for you and your family.

Box 8. A Grab Bag of Relaxation Strategies

EXERCISE
- Ride a bicycle
- Take a walk in the field
- Swim with your family
- Join an aerobic exercise class
- Curl in a bonspiel
- Jump rope for 15 minutes
- Jog along a country road
- Join a bowling league
- Spend the afternoon cross-country skiing

DIVERSIONS
- Attend a concert or show
- Have a winter picnic
- Play with your children
- Take a mini-holiday or a weekend away
- Take pictures
- Put a 1000 piece puzzle together
- Listen to a comedian
- Dance the night away
- Write a newsy letter

HOBBIES
- Read a good book
- Enroll in an art class
- Build a model
- Write your dreams in a diary
- Keep a daily journal
- Take time for a favorite craft
- Plan or work in your garden
- Play a musical instrument

PHYSICAL RELAXATION
- Take a 15 minute stretch break
- Learn a martial art
- Learn Yoga
- Relax by listening to music
- Enjoy a mid-day nap
- Give and get a massage
- Relax in a hot bath, hot tub, sauna or steam room

Activity: Finding New Ways to Relax

(1) Using some of the suggestions of the chapter, find at least two physical relaxation strategies and two mental relaxation techniques that you would like to incorporate into your life on a regular basis.

List here your choices:

Physical relaxation strategies:

_____

_____

_____

Mental Relaxation strategies:

_____

_____

_____

(2) Make some specific and detailed plans on how you will use the strategy to relax. (Specify how often you will engage in the relaxation activity, where, when, etc.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

(3) Use your goal diary or make a new "relaxation diary" to record your relaxation activities. Make a note of how you felt at the end of the relaxation period compared to before. Use your record of relaxation activities to spot any lack of providing quality relaxation time for yourself or your family.

(4) Remind yourself of the need for quality relaxing time every day. Consider including relaxation goals in the "personal"quadrant of your goal setting for your life.

(5) Consider becoming your family's "relaxation director" by spearheading shared family activities which everybody finds relaxing.

List here some ideas of how you can improve your family's "Relaxation Quotient."

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Summary

1. Because of the way the nervous system works, it is impossible to experience stress and relaxation simultaneously.
2. Learning to really relax by the daily use of relaxation strategies is among the best ways to protect yourself from the dangerous effects of chronic stress.
3. Physical and Mental Relaxation go hand-in-hand and can both be produced by concentrating either on physically relaxing or by doing something that produces mental calming.
4. Some physical relaxation strategies which are highly recommended include progressive relaxation, deep breathing, massage, hot baths, exercise, and naps.
5. The mental strategies of autogenic training, using mental imagery, and the distraction of a change of pace can each be highly effective ways to relax and lower stress.

NOTES:

8.

Managing Personal Resources

The FARM Model of Stress Management

"My knowledge in farming is getting better as time goes on. The farm courses I have taken have helped me more than I thought they would."

"Instead of worrying about something I can't do much about, I'd rather spend my energy looking at what we have and how I can make it better."

Both of these comments from farmers represent aspects of managing personal resources. In this final chapter, we would like to continue exploring this type of personal resource management and consider how it can help manage farm stress.

All of us sometimes lose our perspective about ourselves. Stress can chip away at us, and pretty soon if we're not careful, we may end up wondering a lot of things about ourselves. We've seen how stress can challenge our self-esteem, how it can make us feel that we are personally responsible for all of our problems, and how it can attack our feelings of personal competency. Some people may even end up feeling pretty lousy about themselves. All of these feelings make it less likely that we will be able to organize personal resources to moderate stress.

A good place to begin looking at management of personal stress coping resources is by taking an inventory of your strengths and skills. Ask yourself questions about your strong points. In what do you excel. What special knowledge do you have that improves either farm or family functioning? What do other people seem to like best about you? What personal skills do you have which make your job easier? What do you like best about yourself as a person?

Most people are pleasantly surprised to see the length of the list of their strengths and personal assets. The exercise allows them to regain their personal perspective and realize that their personal coping skills are considerable. For most, it's just a matter of using and organizing what we already have to work with.

In this chapter, we would like to provide a framework to facilitate the management of personal resources. We'll consider strategies for improving the management of time in the face of work pressures and overload, techniques to manage yourself so you cause yourself less stress, and approaches you can use to organize your attempts to control your stressors.

The Importance of Planning and Priorizing

In an earlier exercise, you developed goals and priorities for each of the four quadrants of your life (family, work, personal, and social). An important feature of personal life planning involves the occasional self-reminder of these personal goals. Management of personal resources can start by ensuring that your priorities and investment of time doesn't become too discrepant from your stated priorities. If you find that one quadrant of your life is detracting seriously from other quadrants, see what you can do to restore balance. One of the best ways to restore this balance is to reallocate your time. Time-management provides some suggestions which may help.

Managing Time. Farmers are like people in other occupations in reporting that heavy workload pressures are a chief source of work stress. Because of the seasonal nature of some farm work pressures, farmers already have many highly effective time management skills, Few of us, however, are perfect time managers. If we take an honest look at how we use time, most of us could find room for improvement. For example, we would argue that your time management habits need revision if you fail to provide daily periods for rest and relaxation.

Time management consultants typically suggest that you begin by establishing goals and priorities similar to those for the four quadrants of your life. If you haven't done so already, make sure your goals reflect not only a lifetime perspective, but also intermediate and even daily goals for making the best of each day. These daily goals (the "to-do" list) are one of the hallmarks of time management. Some consultants suggest that you begin each day by making this to-do list, until the practice is as habitual as brushing your teeth in the morning or having that first cup of coffee.

Once daily activities are identified on the to-do list, the next step involves ranking the items in terms of priorities. You might try putting each item into one of three categories: must do; should do; or nice to do. The main idea of time management is that to make effective use of your time, you must concentrate on the most important items first.

Although the daily to-do list can be a powerful tool to increase your efficiency, it does have potential pitfalls. Some people become over organized. They fail to allow for flexibility and don't give themselves breathing room in their schedule for recreation and diversion. Periodic breaks from your work are also essential.

Another time management suggestion is to make the most of your "prime" time. Each of us has a time during the day when we are at our best in doing a particular task. Your efficiency can often be increased if you schedule important or demanding tasks for this prime time.

Putting an end to procrastination is another important aspect of both stress management and effective use of your time. Procrastination has a price. It can cause anxiety because it increases the time we spend worrying about having to do a task, inactivity can cause small problems to grow into big ones, and procrastination is a good friend to doubt and indecision. Generally, we procrastinate to escape doing something which we know to be important but which seems too large to tackle. We may put things off to escape unpleasant tasks or even to try and get someone else to do the job. What are some ways of dealing with procrastination?

It's often useful to begin by breaking down overwhelming tasks into smaller ones. Some farmers, for example, dislike keeping the farm records, budget and accounts organized and updated. One way to tackle this type of task is to reserve a small amount of time, say 10 to 15 minutes, work on the task at that time and quit when your time is up. By making this small start-up effort, you may overcome your initial resistance and coming back to the task for another short period on subsequent days becomes more likely.

Another approach to putting things off is to think of something you have been avoiding and listing the things that could happen as a result of inactivity. You will usually find that the advantages of action outweigh the effects of inaction.

Another often overlooked tool for motivating yourself is to ensure that you give yourself a reward for conquering procrastination. Find an important task that you've been dodging, break it into manageable steps, work at the first step and then give yourself a reward. Make the size of the reward related to the size of the task.

Some additional suggestions for effective time management are presented in Box 9.

Managing Me

In earlier chapters, you've examined numerous strategies for self-management. In the present context, it might be beneficial to recall the advantages to stress management of trying to maintain a positive outlook on life, of recognizing your strengths and limitations, and of recognizing and accepting your own natural pace. Some stress can be reduced by marching to your own drum. Don't try to be someone else — be yourself. An important

Box 9. Effective Time Management

ANALYZE
ASSESS
ADJUST
ADMIT
ACT

Analyze:

- Analyze your job demands in relation to your time constraints.

Ask yourself: What needs to be done?
How much time is available?
How can I maximize my time relative to the job?

Assess:

- Assess your personal needs and priorities. Avoid the trap of spending your time doing unimportant tasks. Assess your priorities and rank order them so that you can invest your time appropriately.

Ask yourself: What **must** be done today?
What can wait?
What are the most important things I need to do today?

Adjust:

- Adjust your work effort according to the nature of the task. Do not assume that all jobs require equal effort. Do not let unrealistic expectations and personal standards interfere with achieving a satisfactory job in less time.

Ask yourself: What do I need to do in this situation to complete the job satisfactorily (not perfectly)?

Admit:

- Admit that your personality, your personal work style, your emotional state, and your tension level influence your productivity and efficiency.

Ask yourself:

- How can I accomplish this task considering my personal work style and my current level of motivation?
- What can I do to help myself accomplish this task in the most efficient way?
- How can others assist me?

Act:

- Act don't avoid. Once you have developed a plan based on personal priorities and work requirements, begin working. After you have acted and accomplished your task, give yourself credit. Recognize your success so you will have the emotional energy to continue working on other tasks.

Ask yourself:

- What have I done?
- How do I reward myself for my accomplishments?)

self-management strategy which has yet to be considered in the workbook is worry management.

Managing Worry. Mark Twain once said: "I've suffered a great many catastrophes in my life. Most of them never happened." Worry can create catastrophes that never happen. It is perhaps one of the most destructive of human reactions. With worry, we manage to provide our own internal stressors — as if the external world wasn't doing a good enough job!

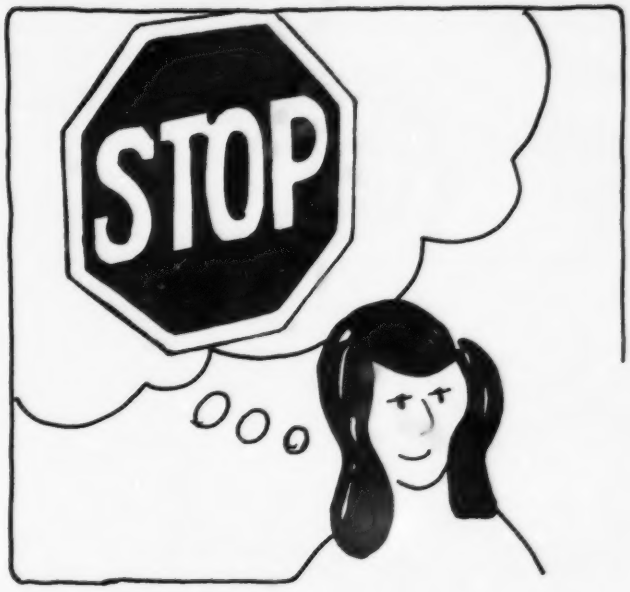
How does one go about the process of worrying less or worrying more constructively? A start to the process involves making the distinction between worry and "problem solving." Worry can have a productive effect if it stimulates us to think about a stressor in a way which leads to an increase in our sense of personal control over the stressor. Unfortunately, most of our worry doesn't fall in this category. Instead of leading to productive problem-solving, it generates periods of fretting and anxiety which changes only one thing — us! You can lessen personal stress by learning to remove worry as a source of stress.

One simple, but highly effective technique to help you stop worrying is called "thought stopping." The process helps you learn to turn off worry just as you would turn off a radio. Three steps are involved in thought stopping:

1. Start by observing your own patterns of worry. Notice when you worry, what you worry about, and how frequently you worry. Practice becoming more aware of spotting when worry is present.
2. Once you have become skilled at spotting worry, imagine a big bright flashing red stop sign. Do what it says — STOP! Replace the mental worries with an image of this compelling signal to stop.
3. Upon stopping a worry, replace it with a more positive thought. Think of something else which is less tension provoking, something which is pleasant or relaxing.

The thought stopping technique almost seems "too good to be true." Is it really this simple to stop worrying? The key to the effectiveness of the worry stopping technique lies in practice. We've spent a lifetime learning to worry, and trying the worry stopping approach a few times probably won't make much of a dent in your worry time. Make no mistake, however, we can control our worry. We learn to worry and we can learn to stop worrying. Give it a try. It may become so habitual and automatic that after a few months you'll find yourself without any worries!

Although most worry is unproductive, if the worry leads us to take some action in dealing with a stressor, it can be beneficial. Sometimes, it can be helpful to look at what we worry about and decide if the worry is trivial or important and the degree of control we can hope to have over the worrisome situation. Some experts have estimated that 95% of our stress reactions are in response to the trivial rather than the important aspects of life. One of the keys to effective stress management is to worry less and to worry more wisely. Spend your energy on the things you truly value and those things you can control. The "Worry Stopper" exercise presented in Box 10 can help these efforts. Begin the exercise by listing everything you worry about — the big and little things, anything that makes you uneasy. List all of your worries including personal things, family factors, finances, health, work concerns, people, global issues and even the trivial little things that bother you.



After listing each worry in its appropriate category, consider some of the implications. Worries in category I (can control and important) are worth worrying about, especially if your worry motivates you to do something about it. If this panel is filled to overflowing, you might want to reconsider just how important each of the items really is to you. Do some of the worries really belong in category IV?

Worries in category II (thing you can't control but are important) may require surrender. If there is absolutely nothing you can do about it, maybe the best approach is simply to let it go! By accepting what you can't change, at least the stress-inducing worry can be lessened.

Category III worries (Not important and can't control) should be crossed off your worry list right now! They are not worth any of your energy.

Items in category IV (can control but not important) are probably not worth the fretting they elicit. These are the little trivial things which can sap our energy. Why continue worrying about things that really are not that important to you? The final step of the Worry Stopper exercise of Box 10 involves developing your own plan. Start by identifying how you'll reintroduce control over the worries. Remember that perceived control is the key to the reduction of stress!

Attacking Your Stressors

We would like to conclude this workbook with a discussion of problem-solving and consider how problem-solving can be used to increase control over stressors. In a certain sense, all of the previously discussed stress management strategies represent attempts to solve the problem of excessive stress. What problem-solving approaches are likely to increase our ability to control stressors?

One of the biggest personal blocks to creative problem solving is lack of knowledge about the problem or possible solutions. Continuing education and learning throughout the adult years is a critical requirement of most occupations, particularly farming. If there's a new

Box 10. My Personal Worry List

•List all of your worries, the big and little things, into the appropriate category.

Category I
I Can Control
Important To Me

Category II
I Can't Control
Important To Me

Category IV
I Can Control
Not Important To Me

Category V
I Can't Control
Not Important To Me

•Circle one item in each category that you would like to stop worrying about. For each choice, write a brief description of how you will accomplish this goal.

Adapted from Tubesing, and Tubesing (1984).

cost-cutting or yield-increasing technique out there, you want to know about it! Increasing your knowledge about farming is probably the first and most important step in attacking some basic farm stressors.

Effective problem-solving contains at least four basic components:

1. Defining the Problem
2. Finding alternative solutions
3. Making decision among the alternatives
4. Implementation of the solution(s)

We are seldom handed a well-defined problem. Usually, we face "situations" where something may be wrong and we have to define the problem ourselves. We have to define the problem carefully if we hope to actually solve it. Sometimes, it is helpful in defining a problem to begin by breaking it into more manageable subproblems. Thus the problem of "world-wide low commodity prices" may be redefined as a problem of finding ways to "reduce costs", "increase yields", or "diversify to a crop or livestock which pays better." Once the problem is defined in this way, it becomes an "improvement problem" — a question of how to change the farm operation to increase financial returns. The nice thing about defining problems as"improvement problems" is that this type of problem-framing automatically starts us thinking about solutions.

"My problem is that I have a lot of responsibilities but no one to delegate them to."

Sometimes we can fail to see these solutions because of either lack of knowledge or out of sheer habit. the "I always do it this way" attitude can be a powerful barrier to seeing the new and creative solution required by a particular stressor. We are reminded of the story of the Ontario tobacco grower and the efforts of this family to switch their operation out of what they felt to be a crop with no future. This farm family reasoned that if the climate of their farm was suitable for growing tobacco, why wouldn't it support peanuts? After all, Canada imports nearly all of its peanuts. Why not try growing them domestically? After growing a small experimental peanut crop for several years, the results showed that the idea was indeed feasible. To make a long story of creative problem-solving short, after solving a string of problems with this new crop (including the need to design special machinery for the harvest), the family succeeded in producing a peanut crop in commercially marketable quantities. To their distress, they discovered there was no market! The imported peanuts could be purchased cheaper than the locally grown product. Not to be outdone, the family started processing their crop into home-made peanut butter. Presently, they employ ten people in a farm operated peanut butter business!

We're not suggesting that peanut farming will provide any answers in your case. However, the story does nicely illustrate an extremely creative approach to problem solving.

One tried and proven approach to coming up with constructive solutions to problems involves brainstorming — both group and individual. Research has shown that there are two indispensable principles of effective brainstorming.

1. **Deferment of judgment.** Don't prejudge or prescreen any ideas. Even if it sounds "hair-brained", put it on the list of potential solutions.
2. **Quantity of ideas breeds Quality.** The more ideas you or your brainstorming group generate, the more likely you are to reach one which best leads to a workable solution.

The idea that "quantity breeds quality" is based on the observation that the first solutions we think of are more likely to be so common or obvious that they may not really represent good solutions. Some of the best solutions are not those which are immediately obvious. If it were immediately obvious, it wouldn't be a problem in the first place!

In the last step of problem-solving, having generated possible solutions, you must make a decision about which alternative shows the best potential. These decisions are ultimately based on the expected gains and losses associated with each alternative. The decision to seek off-farm employment represents a good example. When faced with a tight or impossible financial squeeze, one possible solution is to increase cash-flow by working off the farm. In making the decision, benefits should be weighed against costs (e.g. does the increase in family income outweight the extra demands and pressures on my time, the time away from the family, etc.)

Having selected a potential solution, the final step of the problem solving process is the implementation of the solution(s). The best solution in the world won't work unless you give it a try!

Activity: Managing Personal Resources

1. Take an inventory of your personal strengths, resources, and coping skills. List them here being sure to include all of your strong points:

2. Using some of the techniques identified in the chapter or your own ideas, identify some specific things you would like to do to better manage your time:

3. Complete the worry exercise in Box 10. Describe here some of the things you learned from this exercise:

4. Identify some specific things you will do to manage your worry:

5. Use the procedures suggested in the chapter to problem-solve. Pick a farm stressor and apply the problem-solving procedure to it. Be sure to define the problem as an "improvement" problem. Try individual brainstorming first and then compare the results to brainstorming with your spouse or with other farmers.

Definition of the "improvement" problem: _____

_____

_____

Possible solutions: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Advantages and Disadvantages of each possible solution: _____

_____

_____

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_____

_____

_____

Describe the "best" solution and your implementation plans: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Summary

1. A personal inventory of coping strengths and resources is helpful in identifying your strong points and reminding yourself of your value as a person.
2. Time management is an important component of the management of personal resources for stress control. Time management can relieve stress by introducing more personal control and increasing productivity thereby removing some work overload stressors.
3. Managing worry is a powerful tool for reducing stress. Just as we learn to worry, we can also learn to worry less.
4. Productive problem-solving is an approach to finding constructive solutions to stressors. The process begins with a definition of the problem in "improvement" terms, a generation of possible solutions, selecting the best solution and implementing it. The process of individual or group brainstorming can be helpful in the generation of solutions and knowledge is critical at every step of the problem-solving process.

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About the Authors

James L. Walker and Lilly J. Walker are husband and wife psychology professors at Brandon University in Brandon, Manitoba. Both Drs. Walker have rural roots and have given talks, seminars, and workshops to numerous farm and rural organizations. Topics of their presentations have included a variety of rural and farm issues such as communication, wellness promotion, farm stress, stress-management for farm families, and personal motivation.

Both were recently asked by the federal government of Canada to prepare a background publication for federal employees on farm family issues. Their professional research interests include issues in counselling, farm stress, the role of attitudes in personal stress, and promoting the health and strength of the family farm. Both Lilly and Jim have numerous publications in scientific journals. Their recent work on farm stress represents their desire to combine scientific interests with projects which may produce personal benefits for the farm family.

While Jim tends to spend too much time at research activities, Lilly always finds time for speaking engagements and is in demand as both speaker and workshop presenter.

Lilly and Jim are the parents of an eleven year old son, T.J. In her spare time Lilly enjoys meeting with friends and aerobic exercise. Jim is a bit more sedate, enjoying books and music. T.J. still enjoys nearly everything.